

***Fascist expansionism: between
ideological visions and foreign
policy-making***

A study of territorial expansion in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

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DECLARATION

Composition of this thesis and research for the material presented herein have been undertaken solely by the undersigned.

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ABSTRACT

The debate on the expansionist policies of the Italian and German fascist regimes has been dominated by three questions. First, was the foreign policy of the two regimes programmatic or not? Second, was territorial expansion an ideological-political feature of generic fascism, applicable to both Italy and Germany? Third, was there a continuity or discontinuity between fascist expansionism and the pre-fascist Italian and German expansionist aims? This thesis challenges the rigidity of the above distinctions, arguing instead that the dynamism of fascist expansionism cannot be attributed to one particular element (ideology, domestic structures, international conditions) but originated from a constant interrelation between all these factors. The thesis analyses fascism as a “*nationalism plus*” phenomenon, which blended radical elements of each country’s nationalist tradition with a specific novel commitment to a fascist *new order*. It aims to test two hypotheses: first, whether fascist expansionism was underpinned by specific “fascist” values; and, second, whether expansionism was a generic feature of fascist ideology and practice. It locates a number of pivotal similar features in the two regimes’ ideology and practice, and discusses a series of dissimilarities in their expansionist policies. The thesis argues that these differences cannot be properly understood as derived solely from each leader’s personal beliefs or each regime’s worldview. They should also be related to chronic features of national traditions and aspirations which fascism assimilated and radicalised rather than produced. In this sense, a conjunction of comparative analysis of the two regimes with a similar analysis of national histories in the *longue durée* is needed.

The thesis examines the three levels in which fascist expansionism was expressed - expansion as *ideology*; expansion and *foreign policy-making*; expansion as a *joint enterprise* for a fascist *new order*. On the level of *ideology*, it examines the ideological traditions in the Italian and German post-unification societies and shows how fascist ideology achieved an ideological fusion of pre-existing radical traits in a new synthesis with an increased emphasis on action and a determination to unite reality with utopia. It also studies the expansionist ideologies of the two fascist movements-regimes as coherent systems of thought, with a number of similar underlying features (historic living space, elitism, cult of violence, unity of thought and action) which explain the rigidity and dynamism of the expansionist arguments in Italian and German fascism.

On the level of *foreign policy-making*, the thesis analyses the domestic framework of foreign-policy making and assesses the success of the two regimes’ efforts to produce conditions conducive to the realisation of their large-scale expansionist visions. It lays emphasis on the leader-oriented character of the two fascist systems, which led to the relegation of other powerful groups (traditional élites, fascist parties) to a functional status subject to the will of the leader. It also examines the practical forms of the two regimes’ expansionist foreign policy (i.e. revisionism, colonialism, irredentism) and shows how ideology provided only a long-term framework for expansion. Lack of clear short- and medium-term strategies rendered the fascist foreign policies extremely flexible and opportunistic, alert to external opportunities and unbound by prior commitments.

On the level of *interaction*, the thesis emphasises the neglected importance of the exclusive relation between the two fascist regimes for the radicalisation of their expansionist policies in the second half of the 1930s. It examines the process of fascism’s internationalisation and analyses how both rivalry and co-operation between the two fascist regimes contributed to the radicalisation of their expansionist objectives and policies.

War accentuated all the above tendencies and aspirations of the two fascist regimes. In 1940-41 they embarked upon the realisation of their extreme expansionist visions in a final attempt to unite reality with utopia. Failure, however, to balance means with ends and to achieve an effective form of domestic and international co-ordination transformed an ideological campaign into desperate war-making, pushing fascism to its eventual collapse in 1943-45.

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For the content of this thesis, and for any error of fact or judgement, I alone am responsible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANI	: <i>Associazione Nazionale Italiana</i>
CGII	: <i>Confederazione Generale d'Industria Italiana</i>
DBFP	: <i>Documents of British Foreign Policy</i>
DDI	: <i>Documenti Diplomatici Italiani</i>
DDF	: <i>Documents Diplomatiques Français</i>
DDP	: <i>Deutsche Demokratische Partei</i>
DGFP	: <i>Documents on German Foreign Policy</i>
DKG	: <i>Deutsche Koloniale Gesellschaft</i>
DVP	: <i>Deutsche Volkspartei</i>
FZ	: <i>Frankfurter Zeitung</i>
KPD	: <i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i>
NSDAP	: <i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>
OO	: <i>Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini</i>
PNF	: <i>Partito Nazionale Fascista</i>
PPI	: <i>Partito Popolare Italiano</i>
PSI	: <i>Partito Socialista Italiano</i>
SA	: <i>Sturm Abteilung</i>
Scritti	: <i>Scritti e Discorsi di Benito Mussolini</i>
SPD	: <i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
SS	: <i>Schutzstaffeln</i>
VB	: <i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>

INTRODUCTION

I: Prolegomenon

More than fifty years after the end of the Second World War, fascism still remains an extremely slippery terrain for research. Notwithstanding the numerous works on, and interpretations of, various aspects of the fascist phenomenon, fascism remains a “conundrum” for historians and political scientists alike¹. Lack of conceptual clarity, failure to generate a solid theoretical framework for research, and a tendency to extract fascism from any framework of rationality and “historicity” have contributed to a conspicuous absence of a lasting consensus about what “fascism” really represents. Undoubtedly, recent developments in research have produced a more sophisticated methodology and a reasonable distance from the rigidity of many pioneer interpretations. The postwar “moral” obligation to castigate fascism as an aberration - of national histories, of the whole European civilisation, of capitalism and industrialisation, of modernity, of the human *psyche*² - has subsided, thus allowing for an acknowledgement of fascism’s complexity, ambiguity and seductiveness. The plurality of approaches, however, neither produced unequivocal answers to the most fundamental questions about the nature of fascism, nor fostered any tendencies for consensus-building in key areas of research. We are still left with a plethora of abstruse questions that resist clear-cut responses: about the nature of fascism, about the utility of a *generic* definition or a *comparative* approach to it, about its geographical and historical boundaries, about its ideological significance,

¹ Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York 1994), pp. 1ff

² See, amongst others, Collingwood, R. G., “Fascism and Nazism”, *Philosophy*, 15 (1940), pp. 170ff; Croce, B., *Per la nuova vita dell'Italia. Scritti e discorsi 1943-44* (Naples 1944), pp. 13ff. For a general assessment of this analysis of fascism see Vincent, A., *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford 1992), p. 148; De Felice, R., *Interpretations of Fascism* (Cambridge Mass & London 1977), pp. 14-23

about its place in national and European history, about its relevance to our past and future.

For a comparative study of the expansionist policies of the Italian and German “fascist” regimes the challenge of conceptual and methodological clarity embraces all the above complex issues, but is also magnified by a series of other questions intrinsic to a general theory of foreign relations. It is not coincidental that research on the two regimes’ expansionist policies has generated heated controversies that epitomise the diversification of the existing approaches to the fascist phenomenon. Comparative interpretations are scarce and under constant criticism from the opponents of a generic definition of fascism. Emphasis on the dissimilar characteristics, structures and conditions of the two regimes appears to have rendered comparison and synthesis obsolete, if not methodologically questionable. Even for those interpretations that still subscribe to a generic notion of “fascism”, expansionism is often regarded as that vital *differentia specifica* which draws the final frontier of comparability³. The extreme racist *Weltanschauung* of the Nazi regime with all its well-documented excesses (anti-Semitism, total war, genocide) have frequently served as the basis of the argument that the German case is *singular* and, therefore, defies categorisation. Rather than fostering the impression of similarity, expansionism has become a major liability for the comparative approach to generic “fascism”.

On a more theoretical level, the study of fascist expansionism has stumbled upon a series of controversies about the process of foreign policy-making. The growing popularity of the “primacy-of-domestic-affairs” thesis has cast its shadow upon the relation between *ideology* and *action* in foreign policy. Emphasis on the latter’s role as a diversion from domestic deadlocks or as an effective mechanism for consensus-building (the *social imperialist* thesis) has obscured the relative autonomy of foreign policy-making, especially in regimes whose leaders showed such an obstinate interest in the formulation of foreign policy. In turn, this has undermined the value of ideology in the shaping of foreign policy strategies and in guiding actions in this field. Differences of opinion about whether the expansionist

policies of the two regime were ideological, opportunistic or diversionary have again served to underline their dissimilarities - and thus torpedo the validity of comparison. In general, research has treated the Nazi regime more seriously than its Italian counterpart. The destructive force of Nazi policies, the brutality in implementing them, and the rigidity of the regime's expansionist objectives, have fostered an interest in the ideological aspects of Nazi territorial policies⁴. Such an interest is more limited in the case of the Italian expansionist policies, whose "flexibility" and constant re-orientation have been widely seen as reflections of an unprincipled, non-ideological handling of foreign affairs. The examples of A. J. P. Taylor, I. Kirkpatrick and D. M. Smith are indicative of a historiographical trend which had its roots in the polemical accounts of G. Salvemini but was subsequently pushed to extremes in its depiction of Mussolini's regime as the apotheosis of propaganda without substance or conviction⁵. However, the uncertainty about the role of ideology in shaping fascist foreign policies simply reproduces the lack of consensus that underlies the theory of foreign relations in this field; a lack of consensus that originates no less from the elusiveness of the concept of *ideology*, upon which such a theory is constructed.

In this sense, the comparative stance of this study, and its focus on Italy and Germany as legitimate case studies for a theory of fascist expansionism, are far from self-evident choices. To state the obvious, namely that only the Italian and German interwar regimes nourished expansionist millenarian ideologies *and* possessed the material capabilities to implement them in an aggressive style, is completely different from claiming that fascist expansionism was derived from a fascist ideological commitment to territorial expansion or that such a commitment was a generic element of the fascist worldview. Before embarking on such a course,

³ Perfetti, P., *Il dibattito sul fascismo* (Rome 1984), pp. 10ff; Organski, A. F. K., *The Forms of Political Development* (New York 1965); Payne, S., *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison 1980), pp. 101ff

⁴ See, for example, Burleigh, M., Wippermann, W., *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945* (Cambridge 1991); Epstein, K., "A New Study of Fascism", in Turner, H. A. Jr. (ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York 1975), pp. 2-25

⁵ Salvemini, G., *Dal Patto di Londra alla Pace di Roma* (Turin 1925); *Mussolini Diplomatico* (Bari 1952); *Preludio alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Milan 1967), also translated in English as *Prelude to the Second World War* (London 1953); Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1961); Kirkpatrick, I. S., *Mussolini. Study of a Demagogue* (London 1964); Mack Smith,

however, it is vital to consider two pivotal methodological prerequisites. First, why it is meaningful to re-establish the validity of a generic concept of “fascism”, which in itself legitimises a comparative approach to its different - and idiosyncratic - manifestations. Second, why the scope of such an approach should be limited to these two countries - Italy and Germany - and to that specific span of time - the interwar period.

II: The validity of a comparative approach to fascism: Italy and Germany

In one of his last writings, Tim Mason criticised the lack of a “longer historiographical perspective” in the recent studies on National Socialism. The “decline of the Fascist paradigm”, he argued, and the emphasis on the singularity of the Nazi regime have obscured the fact that “National Socialism was a peculiar part of something larger”⁶. In a similar vein, Ernst Nolte concluded one of his most ambiguous and controversial papers by berating the futility of the recent trend in historiography to “demonise” National Socialism, presenting it as “unique, singular” and unparalleled in every respect⁷. Notwithstanding the dubious methodological and historical validity of his analysis⁸, Nolte expressed a reservation towards the direction of research on National Socialism, a reservation which was reiterated by Mason:

D., *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Harbor 1969); *Mussolini* (London 1981); *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1982)

⁶ Mason, T., “Whatever Happened to Fascism”, in Childers, T., Caplan, J. (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York & London 1993), pp. 254-60

⁷ Nolte, E., “Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s”, in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 17-38, and *Das Europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917-1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolshevismus* (Berlin 1987)

⁸ For a criticism of the methodological and analytical validity of Nolte's recent work, see Evans, R. J., *In Hitler's Shadow. West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London 1989), pp. 24-46. Note also Nolte's role in the *Historikerstreit*, as recorded in Knowlton, J., Cates, T. (eds.), *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (New Jersey 1993), pp. 1-15, 149-54; and in Kühnl, R. (ed.), *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergeht* (Cologne 1987)

namely, that focus on the genocidal and destructive aspects of National Socialism “makes critical distance [from fascism] more difficult”⁹.

Where the two approaches radically diverge, however, is in their prescriptions for the broadening of the research focus. While Nolte’s main objective was to relativise the destructive force of National Socialism by locating precedents and antecedents outside the context of the fascist regimes, Mason called for *constructive comparisons in the framework of a generic “fascist” paradigm*. The significance of his analysis, however, lies in his suggestions for the content and sample of such a comparative approach. Mason does not express nostalgia for the traditional definitions of generic “fascism” (for example, the “totalitarian” approach). The revival of the “fascist” paradigm for him has to be constructed upon a new conceptual basis that would guarantee the soundness and validity of comparison. In this respect, there is only one candidate for a comparative analysis of National Socialism: the under-explored reservoir of Italian fascism. Nolte’s comparisons with such disparate cases as Pol Pot’s Cambodia and the slaughter of the Armenians are “extraneous to any serious discussion of Nazism; Mussolini’s Italy is not”¹⁰.

The demise of the “fascist” paradigm resulted from two completely different needs. The first, paradoxically, was a methodological prerequisite for a fruitful comparative analysis of fascism: namely, the demand for broader empirical research on the various aspects of each “fascist” regime. The second, however, emanated from the disorientation and mystification that the traditional comparative theories of fascism had generated. Lack of clarity about the nature and content of fascism resulted in a number of comparative studies, whose insufficiently justified sample of case studies left the concept of “fascism” in disarray¹¹. The “totalitarian” approach focused on the political features of fascism as regime (i.e. Italy and Germany), but then subjected it to a broader definition which dovetailed with aspects of such a disparate socio-political phenomenon as communism¹². Nolte’s *Three*

⁹ Mason, “Whatever Happened to Fascism”, pp. 255f. See also Payne, S. G., *A History of Fascism, 1914-45* (London 1997)

¹⁰ Mason, “Whatever Happened to Fascism”, p. 260; Evans, R. J., *In Hitler’s Shadow*, pp. 25-46, 86-7

¹¹ The conceptual confusion about fascism is discussed in Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 4-8

¹² See, amongst others, Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London 1967, 3rd ed.); Friedrich, K. (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (Cambridge Mass. 1954); Friedrich, K., Brzezinski, Z. K., *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge Mass. 1956); Schapiro, L., *Totalitarianism* (London

Faces of Fascism provided an insightful account of the ideological similarities between the Italian and German regimes, only to obfuscate his paradigm by including *Action Française* in his analysis¹³. The ideological affinities notwithstanding, the weaknesses of his generic definition are obvious. If “fascism” is a broad *ideological* phenomenon, then why are other case-studies excluded (Austria, Britain etc.)¹⁴? If, on the other hand, “fascism” is both ideology and action, movement and regime, then why is *Action Française* comparable to the Italian and German regimes? Similarly, the all-inclusive studies of the 1960s and 1970s offered insight into numerous intricate aspects of fascism, but at the same time undermined its generic value through an excessive broadening of the sample¹⁵.

Finally, “fascism” suffered another stretch, this time more far-reaching and detrimental to its conceptual specificity. Instead of concentrating on fascism’s *historic* (epochal) dimension - i.e. fascism as the result of the interwar crisis in Europe that established it as a dominant ideological and political force in the 1919-1945 period¹⁶ -, a number of works demolished chronological and geographical limits in favour of a much broader ideological definition of fascism as a universal and diachronic case. The introduction of terms like “proto-fascism”, “non-European fascism” and “post-1945 fascism”, however, has not simply been the result of the expanded focus. It also rests upon a fundamentally *a-historical* conception of fascism. This approach might have been useful in shedding light on the psychological¹⁷ and social foundations of fascism¹⁸, but it also bears two highly

1973). For a recent, interesting comparison between Nazism and Stalinism see Kershaw, I., Lewin, M. (eds.), *Stalinism and Nazism. Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge 1997)

¹³ Nolte, E., *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Die Action Française, der Italienische Faschismus, der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich 1963), and in English translation, *Three Faces of Fascism. Italian Fascism, Action Française, National Socialism* (London 1965)

¹⁴ Many of these cases are discussed in the anthology of Rogger, H., Weber, E. (eds.), *The European Right* (Berkeley 1966)

¹⁵ See, for example, Woolf, S. J. (ed.), *European Fascism* (London 1968), and *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1968); Larsen, S. U., Hagtvet, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1980); Mosse, G. L. (ed.), *International Fascism* (London 1979); Hayes, P. (ed.), *Fascism* (London 1973); Turner, “Fascism and Modernisation”

¹⁶ Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*

¹⁷ Reich, W., *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York 1946); Gurvitch, G., *Les cadres sociaux de la connaissance* (Paris 1966); Theweleit, K., *Male Fantasies*, vol. II: *Male bodies: psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Cambridge 1989)

¹⁸ Lipset, S. M., *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics* (London 1963); Lasswell, H. D., “The Psychology of Hitlerism”, *Political Quarterly*, 4 (1933), pp. 374-84; Germani, G.,

ambiguous implications. Either fascism is an ideological-political *potential* in every society, regardless of different social, economic and political conditions¹⁹; or it is a stage of political development, an extreme form of the authoritarian model, which many societies undergo in one way or another²⁰. These are extremely intriguing assumptions, but they fail to account for the baffling appeal, popularity and destructiveness of fascism in the interwar period.

Yet, in the face of the unpopularity of comparative analysis, there have been systematic attempts to provide the kind of comparison that Mason suggested. The Italian and German regimes have become the focus of some comparative approaches to fascism in the 1980s and 1990s. S. Payne's work²¹, R. A. H. Robinson's studies on European fascism²² and, more recently, De Grand's and R. Bessel's comparative analyses²³ have placed the discussion of a generic concept of "fascism" on a more sound theoretical platform. Bessel's effort, especially, divulges through its title the challenge and power of the suggested comparative approach: namely, that there is as much to learn about the nature of fascism from the similarities as from the differences in the ideology and policy of the "fascist regimes". R. Griffin's authoritative study *The Nature of Fascism* (1994) has built confidently upon this dual significance of comparison. Griffin constructs a clear and elaborate "ideological minimum" for a fascist paradigm (a "palingenetic" form of extreme nationalism in the context of liberal crisis), and then tests its validity against the different representations of this minimum in the various fascist movements and regimes²⁴. In spite of a debatable broadening of focus to extra-European and post-1945 phenomena, the author devotes most space to the Italian and German fascisms,

Autoritarianismo, fascismo e classi sociali (Bologna 1975), and "Fascism and Social Class", in Woolf (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism*, pp. 65-96

¹⁹ Reich, preface

²⁰ Mannheim, K., *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York 1966)

²¹ Payne, S., *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison 1980); *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London 1997)

²² Robinson, R. A. H., *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London 1981), and *Fascism: The International Phenomenon* (London 1995)

²³ De Grand, A. J., *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: The 'fascist' style of rule* (London & New York 1995); Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996)

²⁴ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 26-55

thus acknowledging their primary relevance to any discussion of a generic concept of “fascism”.

In the field of foreign policy, the limits of the comparative sample have somehow been determined by history itself in a *de facto* manner. Of all potentially “fascist” regimes only the Italian, German and Japanese systematically pursued expansionist policies. It was, however, the earlier convergence between the former two, and their closer political co-operation in promoting the goal of a new territorial map in Europe, that has focused the attention to the Italian and German cases. E. Wiskemann’s work has underlined the significance of the German-Italian alliance for the implementation of the fascist “new order”²⁵. In a similar vein, J. Petersen’s study has examined the origins of the two regimes’ politico-ideological convergence in 1933-36 and provides insight into the nature of the Axis alliance, while F. W. Deakin has focused on the significance of the alliance during the Second World War²⁶. Yet, for these comparative -and many other singular - studies, Axis expansionism reflected the triumph of Nazi ideology and policies over a weaker Italian regime that was dragged to aggression and war against its alleged political intentions. In this respect, the work of M. Knox is unique in its analysis of the expansionist penchant of the Italian and German regimes²⁷. Knox has pinpointed the origins of this common propensity in comparable ideological traditions of indigenous nationalism, in the personal visions of the two leaders, as well as in the idiosyncratic circumstances of the interwar period in the two countries. He has also formulated a common theoretical framework which helps to incorporate expansionism into the internal logic of the two regimes. The political and ideological relevance of expansion is established here in two ways: first, horizontally, as a common denominator between the two regimes’ *Weltanschauungen*; and second, vertically, combining the propensity for territorial expansion with the desire for conquest of the domestic

²⁵ Wiskemann, *Rome-Berlin Axis* (London 1966, 2nd), and *Fascism in Italy* (London & Basingstoke 1970, 2nd)

²⁶ Petersen, J., *Hitler und Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933-1936* (Tübingen 1973); Deakin, F. W., *The Brutal Friendship. Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (London 1962)

²⁷ Knox, M., “Conquest, Domestic and Foreign, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany”, *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 1-57; Ibid., “Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships”, in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, pp. 113-33

system. Knox's thesis, granting equal gravity to the ideological value and political functionality of expansion in the Italian and German cases, provides a strong defence for the value of a comparison between them. However, at the same time, it does not revolve around a solid definition of its generic concept of "fascism". In this sense, it is somehow reminiscent of the traditional justification for such a comparison: namely, that we should examine together the expansionist policies of the two regimes simply because they seem comparable, served similar political functions or were pursued concurrently.

This study aims to examine fascist expansionism in each regime on two levels: first, as *ideology*, both in its links with long-term traditions in the two societies since unification and in its relevance to specific "fascist" values; second, as a process of *translating intentions into action* through the influence of domestic and international factors. The unique expression of expansionism as both *thought* and *action* under the two regimes sets them apart from other *quasi-fascist* cases, where expansion remained a utopian ideology or was practised outside the framework of a coherent ideological system. In this sense, comparison provides an opportunity to test two hypotheses – first, whether the two regimes' idiosyncratic propensity for territorial expansion *and* their expansionist policies were underpinned by specifically "fascist" ideas; and, second, whether expansionism can be regarded as a major feature of a generic fascist worldview.

III: Ideology and action: a puzzling relation

The dualism between ideology and action constitutes a pivotal element of the fascist systems, not only in the sphere of foreign policy, but in every aspect of fascist thought and policy. Yet, the nature of this dual relation in fascism has traditionally been an area of heated controversy and debate. Again, the origins of this controversy lay in a general lack of consensus about the role of ideology in the process of foreign policy-making. In spite of many attempts to present the ideology-action problem in fascist regimes as a special feature of "fascism", this debate

remains part of a wider discussion on domestic and foreign policy-making. Perceiving fascist foreign policy as an extreme expression of this theoretical problem might satisfy intentions to mythify or demonise fascism as a completely unique phenomenon. It does not provide, however, a constructive methodological point of departure. The intricate relation of ideology and action is not the exclusive privilege of the study of fascist foreign policies; it is, in fact, not even limited to the theory of *foreign* policy in general. Instead, it remains a philosophical and political riddle in all systems and spheres of policy, domestic and foreign²⁸. Fascism enters the debate as an aspect - however unique - of the wider problem, in the same way that fascism is in itself an aspect of our social, political and ideological history.

Two different debates - the first about the programmatic or opportunistic/diversionary character of fascist foreign policies, the second about the continuities of fascist expansionist policies with previous aspirations - have dominated our perceptions of the fascist phenomenon. We may dismiss their crude polarisation and cut across their artificial barriers, but we can neither disregard it nor refrain from using their terminology as a point of reference. Aspects of the debates are discussed in the following chapters²⁹. Fascist foreign policy - and expansionism in particular - have attracted extensive attention in the context of the debate. This popularity has provided a pluralism of interpretations, sharpened the research focus and enhanced our empirical knowledge of the subject. It has not, however, contributed to conceptual clarity or theoretical elaboration. Polarisation fuelled extremes on both sides of the debate. The result was a model, in which ideology and action are either linked in a linear way (i.e. cause-effect) or form two unrelated categories. The former thesis echoes the obsession of the “programmatic” approaches with ideology as the principal guide for action, despite the impact of domestic limitations and international developments³⁰. The latter thesis reflects an attempt to deconstruct the cult of fascist ideology - in a way, however, that virtually divests action from a long-term relevance to deep-rooted beliefs and long-term aspirations.

²⁸ Thompson, J. B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Oxford 1984), pp. 173-204

²⁹ See below, introductions to Chs. 2, 4, 5, 7

³⁰ See, amongst others, Jäckel, E., *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen 1969), translated in English as *Hitler's Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown Connecticut 1972); Trevor-Roper, H. R., “Hitlers Kriegsziele”, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 8 (1960), pp. 121-33

At the same time, more moderate approaches appeared to have escaped the tyranny of the two extremes, but were often too eclectic to formulate an alternative theory about the ideology-action problem.

The debate about the programmatic or not character of fascist foreign policies has performed an important historiographical role - along with similar controversies in other areas of research - in encouraging constructive exchanges on the role of ideology in foreign policy-making, but it seems to have almost exhausted its *raison d'être*. The elaboration and eclecticism in the arguments of the more recent studies reflect the theoretical poverty of the debate's initial polarisation. This does not mean that the basic theoretical issue that fuelled the debate (i.e. the ideology-action dualism) has lost its pertinence to the study of fascism - and of fascist expansionism, in particular. The calls to transgress the limited horizons of the debate show that a more constructive approach to the ideology-action problem is still needed and wanting. These calls simply betray an underlying belief that new answers lie in a more flexible conception of the role of ideology and action in fascist regimes. Testing the putative ideological character of fascist foreign policy on a day-to-day basis blurs awareness of the long-term purported significance and consistency of a set of pivotal expansionist aspirations. Conversely, rigid emphasis on the long-term dimension of fascist ideology may produce misleading conclusions about the importance of domestic and external forces which affected the foreign policy-making of the two regimes at specific historic conjunctures.

The key to a more coherent and flexible approach to the ideology-action problem lies in a better understanding of the nature and function of *ideology* itself. On a general level, an ideological system consists of two equally important time dimensions. The first pertains to the past and present, and offers an analysis of what *has happened* and what *is happening*. In this way, it codifies past developments and assesses their utility or benefits. At the same time, it crystallises a value-system and a utopian vision which reflects a society with all those elements that have been deemed advantageous, and freed from past features that have been rejected in the previous analysis. The second dimension regards the future as a prescription: what *is desirable* to happen, again on the grounds of the previous analysis. The prescription is formulated with a view to achieving the "ideal" society, but is also located in the

present, in the sense that it offers certain solutions to current grievances and establishes the prerequisites for a long-term process of improvement³¹. The major difference between the first and the second function of an ideological system is simply the difference between *norm* and *operation*. While norm is rooted in theory, operation is a category of *action*. In this respect, an ideological system contains an analysis, a general plan for action and a utopia as the end-result, all in a cohesive unity.

Having said that, ideology is definitely not a detailed scheme for action³². Its “catch-all” character, the vast chronological span of its two dimensions and its link with utopia, render it a *long-term* phenomenon, an ideal-type. It reflects an idiosyncratic interpretation of historic evolution and suggests a long-term pattern of intervention to it, in order to promote the objectives it has prescribed as beneficial. It is related to action, but not on a linear, day-to-day basis³³. Ideology provides hints to regulate and guide short-term developments, but cannot predict or prescribe them, since these are not the results of calculated actions and intentions of a single agent, but rather the cumulative outcomes of the interaction and conflict between many agents and their incompatible prescriptions. This is why no single agent can hope to forge these developments alone. Predictions fail, actions fall short of expectations, plans are superseded by events and different agents are often not capable of promoting their objectives in favourable circumstances. In this sense, ideological systems *per se* can neither prescribe nor determine actions on a *short-term* basis. They generate options which allude to long-term objectives, but the ultimate choice for short-term actions and strategies is left to the agents’ judgement³⁴. Since these agents are not alone, either on the domestic or the international level, their decisions are both *active* and *reactive*: to produce conditions that favour the realisation of their objectives; and to respond to existing domestic and international developments. This is essentially what Marx implied when he concluded that “[m]en make their own

³¹ On this definition of ideology see Seliger, M., *Ideology and Politics* (London 1976), pp. 119ff; Smith, W. D., *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford 1986), pp. 13ff; Duchacek, I., *The Territorial Dimensions of Politics Within, Among and Across Nations* (Boulder & London 1986), pp. 30-1

³² Duchacek, p. 32

³³ Thompson, J. B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, pp. 79ff

history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past³⁴.

These observations are extremely pertinent to the understanding of the ideology-action problem in the field of foreign policy. They remind us that the ability of a given agent to promote their ideological visions is determined not just by the strength of their ideological commitment to a set of general goals, but also by the agent's dominant or not position domestically and internationally. The "primacy-of-domestic-policy" thesis established the interconnection between internal and foreign affairs, as well as their complementary functions. At the same time, the study of international relations placed the foreign policies of individual states in a wider framework, by which their policies were greatly defined, expressed and constrained. This is why it is misguided to exclude any of these elements (domestic circumstances, international developments, ideological traditions, actions) from the examination of a regime's foreign policy. This is also why changes in the handling of foreign affairs reflect the constant fluidity of the context of foreign policy-making, but not necessarily a lack of ideological substance in the long term. Foreign policy remains *one* aspect - albeit pivotal - of a regime's ideology and practice. It has indeed its own internal logic and function, but serves goals complementary with domestic policy and is also influenced by a plethora of other factors. In this respect, it is both an autonomous system of thought and action, as well as part of a wider effort to translate an ideological vision into action and reality. It is autonomous because it involves a clash of interests and aspirations between major political units (i.e. nations, blocs, empires) in the international system, between groups and individuals sponsoring different ideals and views. Yet, foreign policy is only a part of an ideological system's prescriptions for future action. It might serve autonomous long-term objectives, but their functionality should eventually complement or assist domestic achievements (e.g. the welfare of the nation; the prestige or legitimacy of the regime).

³⁴ Cf. Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 125-30; and, in a wider theoretico-philosophical context, Althusser, L., *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London 1976), pp. 119-25

³⁵ Marx, K., Engels, F., *Selected Writings*, vol. 11: *Marx and Engels: 1851-53* (London 1979), p. 103

Fascism could not form an exception to this general model. To suggest that the Italian Fascist and the Nazi regimes dealt with the ideology-action problem in a radically different way could be meaningful only if fascism had evolved in a domestic and international vacuum. This was not the case, however. Fascist ideology was rooted in radical nationalist tradition, acquiring its radical character in opposition to existing ideologies (as a reaction to crisis) and in recasting nationalist themes³⁶. In many ways, as S. Payne has argued, it presupposed a reservoir of latent radicalism in autochthonous nationalist beliefs and a sense of collective frustration or humiliation³⁷. It was a “nationalism plus” ideology³⁸, not just rejecting current values (e.g. liberalism, socialism, conservatism) but also developing previous ideas and aspirations (e.g. elitism, imperial nostalgia) into a new synthesis, updated with more recent experiences (war, the postwar crisis, fear of communism-Bolshevism). The fascist leaderships were admitted to power on the basis of compromise, initially at least, depending on the expertise of traditional non-fascist figures and groups - in the armed forces, economy, administration, diplomacy etc. The struggle of the PNF (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, National Fascist Party) and the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, National Socialist German Workers’ Party) for political supremacy reflected exactly the difficulties that the two fascist leaderships faced in attempting to pursue their special objectives. By the same token, the “fascistisation” of the two systems depended on the two leaderships’ eventual success in overpowering domestic opposition, but was in itself a strategy to achieve a new political and social constellation that was still wanting. On the international level, the tone of foreign affairs was not set by the fascist regimes but by the powers that had guaranteed the Versailles settlement and still had a commanding role in sanctioning any changes to it (i.e. mainly Britain and France). Alone or in the context of the Axis alliance, the fascist regimes were still pursuing *anti-systemic* objectives in the inauspicious circumstances of appeasement and peaceful revisionism. Only in

³⁶ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 56-63, 85-94; Hamilton, A., *The Appeal of Fascism. A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism 1919-1945* (London 1971); Alatri, P., *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome 1963); Mosse, G. L., *Nazi Culture. Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York 1966), and *The Crisis of German Ideology* (London 1966); Stern, F., *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1961)

³⁷ Payne, *History of Fascism*, pp. 240-56

³⁸ Birken, L., *Hitler as Philosopher. Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport, Connecticut & London 1995), esp. pp. 40-1

the context of war were these impediments removed, but by that time the two regimes had to face a different set of obstacles - concerted opposition, limited resources, defeat and finally collapse.

IV: The plan of the study

The general theoretical direction of this study is to analyse expansionism in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as a version of the ideology-action problem. Equal consideration is given to the elements that underpinned the ideology of expansionism in each regime, and to its practical expression as foreign policy. The thesis analyses fascism as a “*nationalism plus*” phenomenon, which blended radical elements of each country’s nationalist tradition with a specific novel commitment to a fascist *new order*. In this sense, a conjunction of comparative analysis of fascism with a similar analysis of national history in the *long durée* is needed. The thesis examines the three levels in which fascist expansionism was expressed - expansion as *ideology*; expansion and *foreign policy-making*; expansion as a *joint enterprise* for a fascist *new order*. On the level of *ideology*, it examines the ideological traditions in the Italian and German post-unification societies and shows how fascist ideology achieved an ideological fusion of pre-existing radical traits in a new synthesis with an increased emphasis on action and a determination to unite reality with utopia (Chapter 1). It also studies the expansionist ideologies of the two fascist movements-regimes as coherent systems of thought, with a number of similar underlying features (historic living space, elitism, cult of violence, unity of thought and action) which explain the rigidity and dynamism of the expansionist arguments in Italian and German fascism (Chapter 2). In order to examine whether there is an “ideological minimum” of fascist expansionism in the two regimes’ ideologies, the ideas and pronouncements of the two leaders are examined as official expressions of commonly held fascist values and beliefs.

On the level of *foreign policy-making*, the thesis analyses the domestic framework of foreign-policy making. It lays emphasis on the leader-oriented

character of the two fascist systems, which led to the relegation of other powerful groups (traditional élites, fascist parties) to a functional status subject to the will of the leader. It assesses, however, the efforts of such groups to shape the foreign policies of each regime. Particular attention is paid to the ideological and political interaction between the two leaders and prominent fascist figures, highlighting the latters' attempts to influence, re-interpret or alter the regimes' official foreign policies as formulated by the leaders (Chapter 3). It also examines the practical forms of the two regimes' expansionist foreign policy (i.e. revisionism, colonialism, irredentism) and shows how ideology provided only a long-term framework for expansion. Lack of clear short- and medium-term strategies rendered the fascist foreign policies extremely flexible and opportunistic, alert to external opportunities and unbound by prior commitments (Chapter 4).

On the level of *interaction*, the thesis emphasises the neglected importance of the exclusive relation between the two fascist regimes for the radicalisation of their expansionist policies in the second half of the 1930s. It examines the process of fascism's internationalisation and analyses how both rivalry and co-operation between the two fascist regimes contributed to the radicalisation of their expansionist objectives and policies (Chapter 5).

War accentuated all the above tendencies and aspirations of the two fascist regimes. In 1940-41 they embarked upon the realisation of their extreme expansionist visions in a final attempt to unite reality with utopia. Failure, however, to balance means with ends and to achieve an effective form of domestic and international co-ordination transformed an ideological campaign into desperate war-making, pushing fascism to its eventual collapse in 1943-45 (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 1

Expansionism in post-unification Italy and Germany until the First World War: on the ideological and political origins of fascist expansionism

I: Introduction

Undoubtedly, the fascist episode has dominated the postwar debate about the course of modern Italian and German history. The domestic and international impact of fascist policies drew attention to the conditions which facilitated the appeal of fascism in the two countries, and to the factors which contributed to the radicalisation of its ideology and political practices. In the first two decades after the war the debate concentrated mainly on the various short-term circumstances of the interwar period: the impact of the First World War, the economic crises of the 1920s and early 1930s, the failure of the democratic systems, and the gradual destabilisation of the European state-system. In this sense, fascism was depicted as a violent, idiosyncratic response to the unique stimuli of the 1920s and 1930s, with little political relevance to the long-term developments in the post-unification history of the two states. The traumatic experience of the Second World War produced a psychological tendency to discredit fascism completely, to present it as an aberration due to short-term anomalies, and to place the whole fascist chapter in a historic parenthesis¹.

¹ For the thesis that fascism marks a break with the past see for Italy: Procacci, G., "Appunti in tema di crisi dello stato liberale e di origini del fascismo", *Studi Storici*, 6 (1965), pp. 221-37; Vivarelli, R., *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l'avvento del fascismo (1918-1922)*, vol. 1: *Dalla fine della guerra all'impresa di Fiume* (Naples 1967). Cf. Tranfaglia, N., *Dallo stato liberale al regime fascista*

The idea that a certain degree of continuity existed between the fascist phenomenon and the pre-1918 history of the two societies was a rather uneasy concession to make, especially for Italian and German historians, in the immediate postwar period. Outside Italy and Germany, however, an increasing interest developed in the interpretation of fascism as the outcome of the ideological and social development of the two countries after their unifications. This tendency was stronger in the case of Germany, because the Reich was widely held to be responsible for the outbreak of the two world wars, but it was also amplified with reference to Italy after the crucial role of the Fascist regime in paving the way for the Axis and, eventually, for war. Consequently, the focus moved to the continuity of an aggressive expansionist ideological tradition, evident in Italy and Germany since the last quarter of the nineteenth century². At the same time, the “primacy-of-domestic-policy” thesis directed attention to the development of long-term authoritarian structures in the two political systems, to the crisis of the Italian and German traditional élites, and to the dynamic mobilisation of a large section of Italian and German voters towards either socialism or radical nationalism³.

This revisionist approach to the problem of how to historicise fascism reached its peak with the so-called “Fischer controversy”⁴. The idea that Nazism might have simply exaggerated intentions and aspirations which had dominated

(Milan 1973). For Germany see Hiden, J., *Germany and Europe 1919-1939* (London 1977), pp. 24-44 and 158-163

² There is ample bibliography on the issue of continuity in German and Italian foreign policies. Amongst others, see Hillgruber, A., *Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der deutschen Aussenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler* (Düsseldorf 1969); Smith, W. D., *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford 1986), esp. Chs. 4, 5, 9, 10; Nipperdey, T., “1933 and Continuity of German History”, in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 489-508; Jarausch, K., “From Second to Third Reich. The Problem of Continuity in German Foreign Policy”, *Central European History*, 12 (1979), pp. 68-82

³ For the “primacy of domestic affairs” thesis see Kehr, E., *Der Primat der Innenpolitik* (Berlin 1965), pp. 152-6. For a discussion see Mommsen, W. J., “Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914”, in Sheehan, J. J. (ed.), *Imperial Germany* (New York & London 1976), pp. 223-68; Doyle, M. W., *Empires* (Ithaca & London 1986), pp. 320, 326f; Germani, G., “Fascism and Social Class”, in Woolf, S. J. (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1968), pp. 65-96

⁴ See Fischer, F., *War of Illusions. German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (London 1975); *ibid.*, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York 1967); *Weltmacht oder Niedergang. Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt 1965); and *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich* (London 1979). For a discussion of the problems involved in the “Fischer controversy” see Moses, J. A., *The Politics of Illusion. The Fischer Controversy in German Historiography* (London 1975); Eley, G., *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston, London & Sydney 1986), pp. 2-8; Mommsen, W. J., “The Debate on German War Aims”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 (1966), pp. 47-72

German policies since Bismarck, had a tremendous impact on German historiography, giving rise to acrimonious debates such as the Fischer-Ritter exchange clearly demonstrated. In Italy, the notion of continuity between liberal and Fascist foreign policy has been an even more sensitive suggestion, given the ideological tendency of anti-Fascist tradition to present Fascism as an ephemeral aberration of national history. When the Australian historian R. J. B. Bosworth alluded to a clear line of continuity between liberal and Fascist expansionism, there was an angry reaction and vehement criticism from a series of Italian historians in defence of the singularity of Fascism⁵. At the same time, a new aspect of the fascist problem attracted considerable attention: what were the long-term similarities in post-unification Italian and German societies that rendered them, and them alone, so vulnerable to the fascist appeal⁶? Despite the differences in the level of economic development, as well as in the social and political structures of the two countries, the fact that they shared the experiences of late state-formation and belated modernisation may shed new light on their common destiny in the interwar years. The attempt to fit the parallel emergence of fascism in interwar Italy and Germany into a single pattern of historic evolution has produced similar controversies about the extent of the long-term similarities between the two countries. Taking into account the significant differences in the economic and social conditions between Italy and Germany, it seems that the “late-comers” theory has provided a better starting point for the understanding of the similar long-term propensity of the two systems for territorial expansion than the theories of uneven economic or political development⁷. Expansion was a means of both accelerating the pace of domestic development, enhancing the international prestige of the “late-comers”, and breaking

⁵ Bosworth, R. J. B., “Italian foreign policy and its historiography”, in Bosworth, R. J. B., Rizzo, G. (eds.), *Altro polo. Intellectuals and their Ideas in contemporary Italy* (Sydney 1983), pp. 52-96; *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London & New York 1998). On the anti-fascist tradition in Italian historiography see Zapponi, N., “Fascism in Italian Historiography, 1986-93: a Fading National Identity”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), pp. 547-68

⁶ Griffin, R. D., *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York 1994), pp. 221-5

⁷ For a discussion of this theory see Hiden, J., Farquharson, J., *Explaining Hitler's Germany* (Totowa, New Jersey 1983), pp. 158ff; and, generally, Kershaw, I., *Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?* (London 1990); Baglieri, J., “Italian fascism and the crisis of liberal hegemony”, in Larsen, S. U., Hagtvet, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen 1980), pp. 318-36

free from the limitations (political, economic, geographical) that their belated arrival had placed upon them.

There are, however, questions that the above theory cannot answer convincingly. The experience of national unification and state-formation might have resulted in common tendencies in the two countries, but it cannot account by itself for their whole post-unification fate, their striking obsession with the idea of *territory*, or the gradual radicalisation of the scope of their expansionist aspirations. The aim of this chapter is to examine the ideological and political origins of fascism expansionism by analysing territorial expansion as a *long-term* tendency and tradition in the post-unification history of the two countries. It illustrates that the emergence of a similar *territorially* expansionist culture in the modern Italian and German states is attributable not simply to their late arrival in the European system, but also to the specific pattern of their state-formation (territorial unification). This experience produced a long-term accentuation of the importance of territory for political, economic, but mainly for symbolic reasons. In the years prior to the First World War, the acquisition of territory became synonymous with national power and domestic prosperity. It provided a basis for the conceptualisation of the political, social and economic aspirations of diverse groups in the two societies, and became a crucial field of confrontation both domestically (among the élite groups; between élites and the mobilised middle and lower classes) and internationally (between countries). It accounts for the *radicalisation* of the expansionist policies of the two countries in the years immediately preceding the First World War and attempts to construct a long-term framework which sheds light on the emergence and scope of fascist expansionism in the interwar period. The second part of the chapter offers a brief analysis of the various pre-war expansionist arguments, and shows that the divisions and failures in Italian and German foreign policies before 1914 further accentuated the long-term expansionist tendencies of the two countries instead of discouraging them. The idea of a territorially complete national unification, the evocation of the imperial Italian and German pasts, the great-power aspirations, and the need of the two “late-comers” to assert themselves in the international system, constituted the long-term ideological and political basis, upon which the pre- and post-war significance of the territorial issue for Italy and Germany rested.

II. National unification and boundaries: the symbolic significance of territory

The patterns of state-formation followed by Italy and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century present a number of crucial similarities. First, they rested upon an ideological and political liberal nationalist tradition which had pursued the goal of national unification as the platform for domestic development and international power. In Italy, the Mazzinian principle of self-determination in 1848 had given rise to the vision of a “new” republican, democratic Italy as the inheritor of the glorious Roman empire, with an historic mission in the Mediterranean area⁸. In Germany, the Frankfurt parliament of 1848 had emphasised the urgency of national unification, in order to abolish the authoritarian structures of the German states, to provide an efficient basis for social and economic modernisation, and to create a German state as a great power in the political vacuum at the heart of Europe.

The second similarity concerned the character of the process of state-formation. In both countries, this process was instigated by one state that had achieved political and economic power, as well as a certain diplomatic position in the European system. Prussia in Germany exploited its political prestige amongst the smaller German states and its great military potential to achieve its goals on its own, while Piedmont in Italy took advantage of the antagonisms among the European powers in order to offset its military incapacity, which had hampered its aspirations in 1848/9⁹. In order to provide legitimacy to their expansionist plans and to their struggle against foreign dominators, both states invoked the principle of self-determination and gradually put forward the ideal of national unification.

⁸ On the Mazzinian vision of a “new Italy” see Mack Smith, D., *Mazzini* (London 1994), Chs. 7-8; Griffith, G. O., *Mazzini: Prophet of Modern Europe* (New York 1970). For the importance of the Mazzinian “myth” in Italy in the first half of the 20th century see, in this study, Ch. 2, Section II

⁹ See Breuilly, J., *The Formation of the First German Nation-State, 1800-1871* (Basingstoke & London 1996), pp. 49-57; Gall, L., *Bismarck: The White Revolutionary* (London 1986), vol. 1; Riall, L., *The Italian Risorgimento. State, Society, and National Unification* (London & New York 1994), pp. 63-75

The third similarity was related to the self-centred ambitions of Piedmont and Prussia. The revisionist historiography of the *Risorgimento* and the *Vereinigung* have long ago exposed the differences between the liberal perceptions of national unification and the political aspirations involved in the efforts of the two states that eventually led to unification in 1861 and 1871 respectively. The establishment of a politically unified nation-state was indeed the outcome of their long struggle against foreign rulers, but it was not a *sine qua non* of their initial plans¹⁰. The goal of national unification only gradually became a more feasible and desired option, linking the ambitions of Piedmont and Prussia for increased power with the revolt of the other Italian and German states, in Italy against Austria in the north, the Bourbon rule in the south, and the Papacy, in Germany against the Habsburg empire and France. The result was the creation of two states which politically represented the two historic nations and satisfied the criteria of a real nation-state in terms of the predominantly Italian/German character of their populations. Yet, in both cases, the goal of *national unification*, i.e. the inclusion of *all* ethnically kin groups in the territory of the new states, was not realised. The invocation of the principle of nationality was not aimed at achieving national unification; it was rather the justification for state-formation under the tutelage of Prussia and Piedmont, and a means to grant legitimacy to their plans for extending their political power in their regions¹¹. When this had been achieved, the two new states declared the process of unification completed. They also renounced or repressed any further *immediate* territorial ambitions, in spite of the continuing existence of Italian/German populations outside their frontiers. Symbolically, Italy and Germany were integrated in the European system not in opposition to, but in alliance with, a common enemy, the Habsburg empire. The conclusion of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) was the purported symbol of the end of the territorial struggle in central Europe.

¹⁰ Breuilly, *Formation*, pp. 100-13; Hughes, M., *Nationalism and Society. Germany 1800-1945* (London 1988), pp. 135ff; Coppa, F. J., *The Origins of the Italian Wars of Independence* (London & New York 1992), pp. 69-111; Blumberg, A. A., *A Carefully Planned Accident: The Italian War of 1859* (London 1990)

¹¹ Breuilly, *Formation*, pp. 103-9, 112-3; Riall, *Italian Risorgimento*, pp. 109ff

A fourth similarity concerned the inflated expectations that the process of unification created in the various groups of the two societies, and the problems of the post-unification period that thwarted these expectations. From the outset, the establishment of a "nation-state" was seen as the necessary precondition for domestic development and international ascendancy. For reasons not entirely linked to the event of unification itself, these hopes were soon disappointed. It is not our intention to provide an analysis of the factors that led to the economic depression in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, or to the slow pace of social and political reform which left the middle and lower classes feeling even more vulnerable than before¹². Such was, however, the symbolic significance of the "unification" myth that these problems were interpreted as complications of the incomplete process of state-formation. Attacks on the notion of territorial saturation grew stronger and further expansion was gradually accepted as the ultimate means for domestic well-being and international prestige. Economic development was linked to a theory of neo-mercantilism, reflecting the idea that growth and power could not be created but only achieved through expansion at the expense of other states¹³. Finally, the social pressures originating from overpopulation and emigration were again associated with lack of resources and territory, thus prescribing further territorial expansion¹⁴.

On the international level, the great-power ambitions of the two new states were inevitably conceptualised in the pre-existing pattern of territorial domination, in Europe and overseas. Nationalism entailed a perception of power that could only be measured in comparison with other states of high international standing. These states,

¹² For the impact of the economic depression of the late 19th century see the classic study by Rosenberg, H., *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin 1967); and the assessment of his work by Eley, *From Unification to Nazism*, pp. 22-41. See also Saladino, S., "Italy", in Rogger, H., Weber, E. (eds.), *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (London 1965), pp. 209ff

¹³ Lichtheim, G., *Imperialism* (London 1971), pp. 66-8; Kitchen, M., *The Political Economy of Germany 1815-1914* (Montreal 1978), p. 180; Magdoff, H., "Imperialism without colonies", in Owen, R., Sutcliffe, B. (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London 1972), pp. 146ff; Offer, A., *The First World War. An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford 1989), pp. 8-9

¹⁴ On the problem of emigration see Segrè, C., *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago & London 1974), pp. 6ff; Bosworth, R., *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (New York 1983), p. 95; Walker, M., *Germany and the Emigration, 1816-1885* (Cambridge Mass. 1964); Mola, A. A., *1882-1912: fare gli italiani. Una società nuova in uno stato vecchio* (Turin 1973), pp. 35-41; Foerster, R., *The Italian Emigration of our Times* (Cambridge Mass. 1919); Clark, M., *Modern Italy, 1860-1995* (London 1996), pp. 161-7; Smith, W. D., pp. 21ff; Borchardt, K.,

primarily Britain and France, had long ago developed a network of colonial possessions that offered them protected markets, raw materials, and prestige greater than Italy and Germany. This had been a time-consuming process - the two new states had to copy the old imperial states under great pressure of time and with severely limited political or geographical flexibility. In this respect, the “late-comer” theory offers valuable insight into the importance and the problems of expansion for the new Italian and German states in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. On the one hand, the late experience of state-formation in Italy and Germany meant that the two unified states had to abbreviate a whole process of social, political and economic development - that had taken centuries in the case of their main competitors, i.e. Britain and France - into a few decades. This would enable them to compete on equal terms with them for the attainment of their great-power aspirations. They had also to adhere to an already existing pattern of competition amongst states (economic, political), to a restrictive concept of the European balance-of-power, and to a geographically limited sphere of potential expansion. The pressure of time meant that they had to hasten for the few remaining territories (the best lands had already been appropriated by the British, French, but also Dutch, Portuguese and Spaniards) before even having resolved the problems of domestic economic development and decided on the priorities of expansion. On the other hand, they were aware that they had started from a territorially underprivileged position and with a growing domestic pressure for establishing a commanding role in the international system. Territory became a *sine qua non* for the political ascendancy of the new states and for the prestige of the domestic ruling forces against the growing challenges from both left and radical right¹⁵.

The prestige factor gradually overshadowed the economic significance of expansion, in the sense that the remaining options were not necessarily the most economically or geographically beneficial ones for the states, but had to be exploited for reasons of international competition¹⁶. Political pressure for expansion meant that

“Germany”, in Cipolla, C. (ed.), *Fontana Economic History of Europe*: vol. 4: *The Emergence of Industrial Societies* (Part I) (London & Glasgow 1973), p. 123

¹⁵ Reichman, S., Golan, A., “Irredentism and Boundary Adjustments in Post-World War I Europe”, in Chazan, N. (ed.), *Irredentism and International Politics* (Boulder & London 1991), p. 66

¹⁶ On the inability of the Italian and German states to increase trade with their colonies see, amongst others, Stoecker, H., “The German Empire in Africa before 1914: General Questions”, in Stoecker

economic and social needs had to be adapted afterwards to the - often limited - opportunities offered by the seized territories. At the same time, economic infiltration, both in European and overseas territories (informal imperialism), was often seen as something more than a goal in itself. It was also a form of political investment for future expansion in those areas, when circumstances would be favourable. Economic exploitation of colonies was often a very costly enterprise, with little support from industrial and economic interests in the metropolis, and became the subject of severe criticism¹⁷. Criticism was, however, mainly directed against ineffectual or limited expansion, not against expansion as such. Failure in one field simply increased the appeal of the other forms of expansion. With the exception of the socialist left, territorial aggrandisement remained high on every other political agenda. The plethora of expansionist arguments that emerged after unification in Italy and Germany reflected a symbolic significance of territory which was more important than the political or economic considerations behind expansion.

Thus, we arrive at a widely disregarded common element which underlay the idiosyncratic expansionist tendencies of the two states and remained a constant *long-term* factor in the ideology of Italian and German nationalism. The process of national unification had not taken place in a geographical or political vacuum. In both cases, it involved the incorporation of populations inhabiting territories under foreign rule. It rested upon political control of *territories* and this, in turn, presupposed territorial *conflict*. Ultimately, unification entailed the expansion of Piedmont and Prussia at the expense of international “enemies” and against the opposition of domestic antagonists. At the same time, because the concept of an Italian or German “nation” had predated state-formation, it was extremely difficult for the new states to claim a real “nation-state” status once they had opted for the “small” territorial solutions¹⁸. As has been shown, the principle of self-determination

(ed.), *German Imperialism in Africa* (London 1986), pp. 188ff; Henderson, W. O., *The German Colonial Empire, 1884-1919* (London 1993), pp. 149-51, Tables 2, 4; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 184f; Anderson, M. S., *The Ascendancy of Europe. Aspects of European History, 1815-1914* (London 1972), pp. 215f

¹⁷ Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, pp. 14ff; Smith, W. D., pp. 32-40, 52ff; Webster, R. A., *Industrial Imperialism in Italy, 1908-1915* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1975), *passim*

¹⁸ Roseman, M., “National Socialism and Modernisation”, in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 220-1; Eley, *From Unification to Nazism*, pp. 61-84

was only a minor consideration behind the policies of Cavour and Bismarck. This consideration was quickly cast aside with the subsequent renunciation of the goal of “complete” national unification (uniting all Italian *irredenta*; *Grossdeutschland*) by Cavour and Bismarck. In the 1870s the two states declared their territorial “satiation” in Europe, despite growing awareness that the ethnically incomplete unifications had increased the popularity of irredentism and had produced a stronger pressure for expansion outside the European system. In this way, however, they did nothing to allay a growing feeling that, although the “nation” was the basis of state-formation, the state had abdicated its responsibility to incorporate all populations and territories which formed part of this “nation”. Voices advocating expansion and an ethnically and territorially “complete” unification proliferated and became increasingly vocal¹⁹. The pressures upon the governments for tangible manifestations of national prestige, and the need to combat the post-unification disillusionment in the two countries strengthened the link between domestic and foreign policies. Territorial concessions came to be seen as the ultimate political and economic solution to domestic grievances. The fact that these aspirations were temporarily diverted to colonial antagonism did not preclude a return to territorial conflicts in Europe, should more auspicious circumstances arise. After 1900, with the gradual disintegration of the European balance of power, these suppressed ambitions were once again on the agenda and eventually led to a war that was essentially a territorial struggle *on the continent*.

In this sense, the key-element in the propensity for expansion which characterised the foreign policies of Italy and Germany lay in a combination of two factors. First, it was the political priority of the two states to establish their hegemonic position by antagonising the most advanced countries or by squeezing concessions out of them (i.e. Italy with the Treaty of London; Germany with the Algeçiras Treaty, and the agreements of 1909 and 1911 regarding Morocco)²⁰. This presupposed that the “late-comers” had to “catch up” with the other powers (Britain

¹⁹ Hughes, M., pp. 142ff; Chickering, R., *We Men Who Feel Most German. A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston 1984), pp. 76-7; Frymann, D. (pseudonym for H. Class), *Wenn ich Kaiser wäre. Politische Wahrheiten und Notwendigkeiten* (Leipzig 1912); Fischer, *War of Illusions*, p. 245ff

²⁰ Webster, pp. 191ff

and France, but also Austria and Russia) in the shortest possible time and often under quite unfavourable domestic and international circumstances. Second, it was the aggressive character of their state-formation, based on a struggle to gain territory from other states, which survived the period of unification and permeated the foreign policies of the new Italian and German states. Territory was identified with the very existence of the nation-state. Politically, this reflected a wider conviction that political control over territory guaranteed domestic stability, either as a form of social imperialism or as “space” providing resources to help solve economic and social problems. Psychologically, it symbolised a tendency to view the post-unification period as a continuation of the unification war, of the struggle against the same foreign foes who had for so long denied the national existence of Italy and Germany. It also signified the failure of the new “states” to overcome the predominantly ethnic definition of “nation” and foster the idea of a “complete” nation-state. National territory remained a vague concept which transformed irredentist arguments into an open-ended commitment to expansion.

III. The radicalisation of the Liberal and Wilhelminian expansionist policies: the emergence of radical nationalist organisations

This long-term symbolic significance of *territory* in post-unification Italian and German history lends considerable credence to the “latecomers” theory. However, explaining the radicalisation of the expansionist policies of the two countries in the years up to the First World War requires the examination of another crucial development - the *emergence and mobilisation of radical nationalist organisations*. The process through which the ideological developments on the radical nationalist right affected the conduct of foreign affairs in the two countries was a highly complex one. On an ideological level, the transformation of the nationalist movements in Italy and Germany into imperialist organisations, with beliefs in the transcendental power of the *nation* and a growing aggressive tone in their territorial programmes, largely predated the political emancipation of the two

movements. In Italy, the turning-point in the ideological transformation of the nationalist right was the foundation of the Italian Nationalist Association [*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, ANI] in 1906. The new organisation aimed to give political expression to the “new” nationalist ideology that had made its appearance after the traumatic defeat at Adowa in 1896²¹, in an attempt to restore faith in the capacity of the new Italian state to acquire the prestige that its glorious past justified²². The ANI became an umbrella organisation for the various nationalist groups, covering a wide spectrum from radical ideologies of imperialism to the liberal exponents of irredentism. It attempted to provide a synthesis of the different nationalist ideologies into a uniform programme for domestic rejuvenation and international ascendancy, and thus justify its political function as the main representative of a nationalist renaissance in contrast to the “old”, bankrupt official nationalism of the Italian state. In Germany, such an umbrella organisation did not theoretically exist, with a number of new groups emerging in the first decade of the twentieth century and a fairly even distribution of membership figures among them²³. However, the central role that the Pan-German League [*Alldeutsche Verband*] had occupied in the representation of the radical nationalist viewpoint since the 1890s rendered it a mirror of the ideological developments in the whole German radical nationalist movement²⁴. The intensification of the aggressive character of the organisation under the leadership of Heinrich Class reflected the emergence of a new trend in German nationalism. This trend supported a confrontational foreign policy against the other European states, a revival of the imperial glories of the German

²¹ For the defeat at Adowa see the detailed analysis in Del Boca, A., *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (Rome & Bari 1976), pp. 579-750

²² Adamson, W., “Avant-garde political rhetorics: pre-war culture in Florence as a source of post-war fascism”, *Journal of European Ideas*, 16 (1993), pp. 753-7, and “The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy: Rhetorical Continuities between Pre-war Florentine Avant-garde and Mussolini’s Fascism”, *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), pp. 22-51; De Grand, A. J., *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism in Italy* (Lincoln & London 1978), pp. 23ff; Gaeta, F., “L’Associazione Nazionalista Italiana”, in Gentile, E. (ed.), *L’Italia giolittiana. La storia e la critica* (Rome & Bari 1977), pp. 253-68

²³ For a list and short description of the other radical nationalist organisations in Wilhelminian Germany, see Eley, *Reshaping the German Right*, pp. 41-206; Hughes, M., pp. 130-40

²⁴ Chickering, pp. 1-14 (for different views). Cf. Kruck, A., *Geschichte des alldeutschen Verbandes, 1890-1939* (Wiesbaden 1954)

nation and an extensive territorial agenda for expansion, mainly in Europe but also overseas²⁵.

Another major factor which encouraged the radicalisation of Italian and German foreign policies was the deterioration of international relations during the last decade before the war²⁶. Colonial disputes had reached such levels of political confrontation and geographical diffusion that they affected the stability of the European system itself. This happened in two different ways. *First*, some colonial disputes were by their nature directly linked to the European balance of power. This was the case with Libya. The Italian campaign of 1912 was indeed a colonial war, but also a war against the Ottoman Empire, which had long before been considered politically indispensable for the equilibrium in the Balkans and east Mediterranean. The defeat of the Ottoman forces in Libya and the Aegean Sea entailed a colonial success for Italy, but at the same time exposed the crumbling political base of Ottoman rule in those areas. The huge political vacuum in south-eastern Europe had become apparent long before the campaign against Libya, since the Ottoman Empire had lost most of its European territories before 1912. The Italian victory, however, further encouraged many European states to seek a stronger politico-economic position in the region at the expense of the Empire²⁷.

Second, colonial conflicts brought certain states together in new alliances and led to a rapid polarisation of the European system. Germany's aggressive behaviour, manifested in the two Moroccan crises, was perceived as a direct challenge both to French (who controlled the colony) and also to British interests in Africa and the Mediterranean. Contrary to the hope of German governments, the Tangier and Agadir incidents solidified a united front between the two western Powers. The formation of the *Entente*, with the later addition of Russia, meant that bilateral

²⁵ Chickering, pp. 74-101; Smith, W. D., pp. 94-111; Fricke, D. *et al.*, *Bürgerliche Parteien in Deutschland. Handbuch der Geschichte der bürgerlichen Parteien und anderen bürgerlichen Interessenorganisationen vom Vormärz bis zum Jahr 1945*, vol. I (Berlin 1968), pp. 1-26; Wertheimer, M. S., *The Pan-German League, 1890-1914* (New York 1924); Eley, *Reshaping*, pp. 48-58

²⁶ The importance of diplomatic developments and international relations as a cause of the First World War is underlined in Doyle, pp. 320-3; Mansergh, N., *The Coming of the First World War. A Study in European Balance of Power* (London 1949). Cf. Taylor, A. J. P., *Germany's First Bid for Colonies, 1884-1885. A Move in Bismarck's European Policy* (Hamden, Connecticut 1967), pp. 5ff

²⁷ Segrè, "Il colonialismo", pp.135f

differences were inevitably internationalised. Apart from solidarity amongst allies, challenges against the colonial or European frontiers of one state were translated into issues of wider European interest, involving whole coalitions of states. This multiplied the implications of single international rivalries and facilitated an increasingly confrontational reaction on the part of the European states in their international relations.

The decline of the European balance of power in the last decade before the First World War played a crucial role in the radicalisation of the territorial policies of the late-comers. It encouraged the ideological extremes of the radical nationalist organisations, by confirming their major ideological postulate: that nations *have to* struggle for survival and living space against other nations. This struggle, according to them, was a natural necessity which kept nations alive and powerful²⁸. It also created the political circumstances which made possible the expression of aggressive expansionist claims on the level of official foreign policy. This combination of domestic pressure for expansion and international opportunities for confrontation provided the argument for territorial expansion with an unprecedented popularity and political utility.

However, international antagonisms in the decade before 1914 are historically important not only for their contribution to the atmosphere that led to the Great War. In the long term, they prompted transformations in the basic structures of the European system, the effects of which were felt in the interwar period. Their legacy was a long-term radicalisation of territorial politics, an accentuation of the importance of territory *per se*, an obsession with matching ethnic with territorial boundaries, and a new political pattern of confrontation between traditional powers and the two late-comers. National power became synonymous with aggressive expansion, and the collapse of international co-operation led to the eventual questioning of the whole political and territorial framework of the European state-system. This tendency survived the First World War and contributed to the outbreak of another war in a very short period of time, and this was not simply coincidental²⁹.

²⁸ Alatri, p. 13; Malaparte, C., "Mussolini and National Syndicalism", in Lyttelton, A (ed.), *Italian Fascisms: From Pareto to Gentile* (London 1973), pp. 225-41

²⁹ For a discussion of these issues with regard to the interwar period, see, in this study, Ch. 4, Section III

IV: The radicalisation of expansionist arguments: irredentism, continental expansion versus colonial expansion, conquest versus economic infiltration

The radicalisation of territorial politics in the years prior to the First World War dramatically affected the way in which expansion was conceptualised in Italian and German society. Although traditional arguments for territorial aggrandisement (irredentism, colonial expansion, economic infiltration, “living space”) continued to dominate the debate in the two countries, their content underwent a long-term transformation. The shift to confrontational policies was reflected in the radicalisation of previously moderate arguments (irredentism) and in the priority given to continental expansion and territorial conquest (as opposed to overseas expansion and informal imperialism). We shall now turn to these separate expansionist arguments and examine the process of their radicalisation, their contribution to the aggressive spirit which led to the First World War, and their legacy to the post-1918 expansionist ideologies in the two countries.

Irredentism

The historic origins of irredentism lie in the liberal nationalist ideology of the nineteenth century. The term signified the desire of an ethnically homogeneous, yet scattered, population to be incorporated in the same political unit, the *nation-state*, on the basis of national self-determination. Clearly, the dream of a *complete* unification of the Italian and German peoples presupposed a political vacuum in central and eastern Europe, namely the absence of strong states occupying territories and controlling peoples claimed by the “new” states. This was not the case, however. Powerful neighbouring states (France and the Habsburg empire, in the case of Italy; the same two plus Russia in the case of the German Reich) placed territorial

restrictions upon the plans of Cavour and Bismarck for a *complete* national unification. This led to a political compromise which had two characteristics. On the one hand, it allowed the establishment of the Italian and German states as *nation-states*, representing politically the Italian and German historic nations in the European system. On the other hand, the incomplete unifications prompted the formation of national *irredenta* outside the frontiers of the two states. In this sense, the post-unification irredentist claims of Italian and German nationalism reflected an attempt to resume the artificially interrupted process of national and territorial unification by non-aggressive, liberal means³⁰.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century irredentism acquired a new popularity within the wider nationalist discourse of the two countries. In Italy, the Mazzinian vision of a unified Italian state, based on self-determination, survived in various nationalist organisations which emerged in the three last decades of the nineteenth century. The story of all these organisations (*Pro-Italia Irredenta*, 1877; *Dante Alighieri*, 1889; *Trento e Trieste*; *Pro Patria* and others³¹) followed a similar pattern until the turn of the century. Largely confined to intellectual circles, with a relatively small membership and a non-aggressive character, they advocated the ideological and ethical priority of irredentism over all other forms of territorial politics. Anti-Austrian sentiments - inheritance of the bitter *Risorgimento* struggle since 1848 - made the irredentist claims to Trento and Venezia Giulia politically more important than the claims to the south-eastern coast of France³². The early alignment, however, of the Italian state with the Triple Alliance rendered territorial expansion at the expense of the Habsburg Empire impossible³³. Italian governments from 1876 onwards endeavoured to play down the importance of irredentist agitation in the country, while taking active steps to limit the influence of nationalist

³⁰ On the ideological importance of the "unification" theme for Italian and German expansionism, see, in this study, Ch. 2, Section IIc

³¹ Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 45-57; Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 141ff

³² Sandonà, A., *L'irredentismo nelle lotte politiche e nelle contese diplomatiche italo-austriache* (Bologna 1932-1938), II, pp. 151-4

³³ Hence, the ephemeral popularity of the anti-French irredentist claims of the Italian nationalist organisations. See Thayer, J. A., *Italy and the Great War. Politics and Culture, 1870-1915* (Madison & Milwaukee 1964), p. 145; Sandonà, I, pp. 124f

organisations, especially in the north-eastern provinces³⁴. It has been argued that Manzini and, later, Crispi, turned to Africa as a substitute for the impracticality of irredentist claims³⁵. Such an assertion, however, is anachronistic, since irredentist ideology did not occupy a prominent position on the expansionist agenda before the first decade of the twentieth century. Before that time, even irredentist organisations acknowledged the political necessity of the alliance with Austria³⁶. In the same vein, official Italian foreign policy aimed to uphold the European balance of power, accepting the political necessity of a strong state at the heart of Europe (Habsburg Empire) at the expense of the principle of self-determination which underlay the formation of the Italian state³⁷.

Similarly, the formation of the Pan-German League in 1893 reflected - as its title suggests- the ideological popularity of the irredentist argument in post-unification Germany, but was initially confined to an aspiration not involving *immediate* political action. The right of all the German *Volk* to belong to the same state was a demand shared not only by nationalist organisations, but also by liberal and non-conservative circles of the German society³⁸. This right, however, did not amount to a questioning of the European territorial map, especially since expansion could be pursued in other, less aggressive forms, in colonies or through economic infiltration in Europe. Until the first years of the twentieth century there was a flexibility in the ideologies of *Lebensraum*: economic or territorial, living-space could be claimed anywhere without subverting the overall territorial settlement. Thus, irredentism remained marginal to the territorial debate in Germany until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Increasing European instability, in conjunction with nationalist mobilisation in the two countries during the decade before the war, transformed the context of irredentist ideology and provided it with a new political significance. In Italy, the

³⁴ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 50-4, 96ff, 112; Thayer, pp. 125ff, 171; Sandonà, II, pp. 163ff; Seton-Watson, pp. 407-8

³⁵ Segrè, "Il colonialismo"; Sandonà, II, pp. 151f

³⁶ Seton-Watson, pp. 397f; Alatri, pp. 13-4. Note that, even in August 1914, the ANI initially supported negotiations with the Triple Alliance [De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 60ff]

³⁷ Lowe, Marzari, p. 112

“new” nationalist movement rejected the mediocrity of the post-unification Italian system and advocated instead an expansionist policy as part of a rejuvenating process and a completion of the *Risorgimento*. The policies of the Italian governments after the defeat at Adowa in 1896 remained focused on the task of domestic reform, renouncing irredentism as “sentimental rhetoric”, incompatible with the country’s strategic interest in strengthening the Triple Alliance³⁹. This dogma did not change significantly even after the nationalist agitation following the Bosnian crisis, when the Giolittian administration was severely criticised for playing down any Italian claim for territorial compensation⁴⁰. The chasm, however, between the “old” and “new” Italy, *Italia legale* and *Italia reale*, was constantly growing⁴¹. The ideological synthesis in the framework of the Italian Nationalist Association provided the conceptual platform for incorporating the liberal irredentist argument into a wider programme of territorial aggrandisement. Especially after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the imperialist wing of the ANI acknowledged the political utility of irredentism. A small liberal irredentist group, under the leadership of Bissolati and Sighele, joined the ANI, aiming to preserve its ideological autonomy in the context of this anti-Giolittian nationalist conglomeration⁴².

By 1910, however, the incompatibility between the aggressive imperialist wing and the narrow “liberal” irredentism by Sighele and Bissolati (again anti-Austrian and anti-imperialist) prepared the ground for a final struggle for the soul of the ANI. The Libyan campaign marked a turning point in the fate of irredentist ideology in Italy. The Irredentist group within the association reacted against the

³⁸ See, for example, Max Weber’s preference for a “complete unification” or for no unification at all, in Mommsen, W. J., *Max Weber and German Politics 1890-1920* (Chicago & London 1984), pp. 68-9

³⁹ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 96ff; Bosworth, *Approach of First World War*, p. 119

⁴⁰ Pastorelli, P., “Il principio di nazionalità nella politica estera italiana”, in Spadolini, G. (ed.), *Nazione e nazionalità in Italia* (Rome & Bari 1994), pp. 190-1

⁴¹ Adamson, “Avant-garde”, pp. 753-7; Lotti, L., “L’età giolittiana”, in Spadolini (ed.), pp. 56ff. See, in general, Nöther, E. P., “The Intellectual Dimension of Italian Nationalism: An Overview”, *History of European Ideas*, 16 (1993), pp. 779-84

⁴² Initially, the Italian Nationalists had criticised the concept of irredentism. See De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 13f; Corradini, E., “Nazionalismo e sindacalismo”, in Perfetti, F. (ed.), *Il nazionalismo italiano dalle origini alle fusione col fascismo* (Bologna 1977), pp. 91ff; and “Classi proletarie: socialismo; nazioni proletarie: nazionalismo”, in Castellini, G. (ed.), *Atti del Congresso di Firenze* (Florence 1911), pp. 21ff]. The Congress of Florence (1910) did succeed in temporarily disguising the ideological rifts between the Irredentists and the imperialist wing of the emerging ANI [De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 23-7]

broader imperialist campaign that treated the *irredenta* as part of a historic claim for the restoration of Italian rule in the Mediterranean. Yet, by the Congress of Rome in 1912 the Irredentists had been completely marginalised, first ideologically, and then politically, following the withdrawal of Sighele from the Association⁴³. Consequently, anti-Austrian irredentism survived in the new Italian nationalist ideology, but only after having made two irreversible concessions⁴⁴. First, the programme of the ANI reduced it to one of several elements of territorial policy, thus facilitating the synthesis of colonial, imperialist and liberal expansionist goals. Second, by its absorption into the militant expansionist spirit of the ANI, irredentism assumed confrontational implications which facilitated its conceptualisation in terms of international territorial rivalries. This, in turn, made possible its adoption as official foreign policy of the Italian state in 1915, as part of an aggressive expansionist programme in contrast to the initial liberal inspiration of the concept⁴⁵.

Similar tendencies characterised the irredentist ideology of the German *völkisch* nationalist movement which revolved around the Pan-German League. The proposition that the unification of 1871, involving the concept of a *Kleindeutschland*, was territorially incomplete acquired a new political significance in the decade before the war⁴⁶. Of course, the main current of German irredentism, namely the union with the German population of the Habsburg empire, was politically unrealistic in the context of the Triple Alliance. However, the deterioration of European international relations after 1905 provided three further stimuli to the development of a stronger irredentist element in German nationalist ideology. First, the limited gains from colonial expansion re-focused territorial policies on the European continent, thus providing ideological currency for the ideas of a central European union (*Mitteleuropa*), in economic or even annexationist terms⁴⁷. Second, the collapse of Russian-German relations led to ruthless policies of russification of the German minorities of the Tsarist empire, thus provoking the interest of the German nationalist

⁴³ De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 34ff, where the radicalisation in the expansionist ideology of the ANI is also accounted for.

⁴⁴ Sandonà, III, pp. 151-4

⁴⁵ Pastorelli, P., "Il principio di nazionalità", pp. 189-92; Webster, pp. 334f; Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 142f

⁴⁶ Chickering, p. 76; Fischer, *War of Illusions*, pp. 263-4

⁴⁷ Smith, W. D., pp. 109-11

movement in the fate of Germandom outside the frontiers of the Bismarckian Reich. Third, the irresponsible, self-centred policies of the Habsburg empire infuriated German nationalists to the degree that they even wished for a quick war, in order to cause the collapse of the Dual Monarchy and thus redeem the German territories and populations of the *Ostmark*⁴⁸.

In the remaining years before the outbreak of the war, the idea that the existing German state was a *Vorstaat*, a transitional stage in the process of state-formation⁴⁹, was coupled with the economic and defensive necessity of territorial expansion in central and eastern Europe. As in the case of Italy, the overlapping of irredentist claims with imperialist plans for the economic and political domination of vast areas of the continent provided a synthetic ideological platform for aggressive territorial expansionism. Irredentism was placed in the wider context of a *Lebensraum* policy, echoing the millenarian obsessions of the *völkisch* nationalist movement for the historic mission of *Grossdeutschland*. As in Italy, the radical nationalist organisations in Germany accomplished a remarkable ideological preparation for combining the claim for colonial expansion with irredentist objectives, in order to achieve both national development and international prestige. They plucked irredentism out of its liberal context and reintroduced it as a prerequisite for national power in competition to other European states. This meant that irredentism acquired a political role in international rivalries and was directed in an *aggressive* manner against the territorial integrity of those states still holding the *irredenta* within their frontiers.

What expansion? Continental versus colonial expansion, formal versus informal imperialism

Throughout the period between the 1880s and the First World War, ideological and political controversies emerged about the most beneficial type of expansion. These controversies involved official government policies, organisations

⁴⁸ Chickering, pp. 289-90

⁴⁹ Chickering, p. 76; Sheehan, J. J., "What is German History? Reflections on the role of the nation in German history and historiography", *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981), pp. 1-23

not affiliated to a political party, and public opinion in the two countries. The dilemma between continental and colonial expansion permeated the expansionist debate in Italy and Germany, and produced a rough polarisation which survived the First World War. This was understandable, since on a theoretical level the two expansionist arguments represented different perceptions of national prestige and different philosophies about how expansion could aid the goal of national development. The advocates of colonialism regarded overseas expansion as combining territorial expansion and economic growth without destabilising effects for the European balance of power. They also supported the idea of colonial possessions as a symbol of great-power status, thus enabling the “late-comers” to achieve equality of standing with the other European great powers⁵⁰. For them, European stability was a prerequisite for the fruitful advance of national goals and they hoped that colonial expansion would, in the long run, deliver more substantial politico-economic benefits than any expansion in the continent.

On the other hand, the so-called “continentalists” supported the reverse argument: expansion in Europe and the political acceptance of the “late-comers” as equals by the major powers of the continent was the necessary precondition for a broad expansionist policy overseas⁵¹. According to the exponents of this position, the state should look for material resources, “elbowroom” and political prestige in Europe before embarking on a world policy. They did not advocate the undermining of the stability of the continental system, but believed that the real struggle amongst European nations would be eventually transferred from the colonies to the continent. It was, therefore, vital to guarantee their strong politico-economic position in Europe, to win a hegemonic role in European affairs, with the acquisition of colonies as a complementary objective. Furthermore, Europe and the Mediterranean had historically been the cradle of the Italian and German civilisations, the area where they had established their vast empires in the past and from where they had acquired their strength. In this sense, continental expansion possessed a historic and symbolic significance, reminiscent of the hegemonic role that the two nations had exercised in Europe and the Mediterranean in the past.

⁵⁰ Plehn, H., *Deutsche Weltpolitik und kein Krieg* (Berlin 1913)

⁵¹ Fischer, *War of Illusions*, pp. 259ff

This theoretical controversy was coupled with another controversy, this time about the character of expansion. There was tension between economic infiltration and territorial conquest, i.e. between *economic* and *political* control over territories⁵². Again, this controversy originated from different perceptions of how territory would benefit domestic well-being and national prestige. Economic infiltration promised the creation of an informal empire, in Africa, Asia and south/central Europe alike, which could provide immediate material solutions to domestic needs, and help the expanding industrial sectors against foreign competitors. More importantly, however, it could also enhance the political strength of the state without risking a costly military confrontation for territorial control. On the other hand, the advocates of annexation focused on three different aspects. First, they stressed the importance of territory as “space” for the problems of emigration and overpopulation⁵³. Second, they asserted that Italy and Germany, as “late-comers”, could not compete on equal terms with the other great European powers on the economic level, because they lacked the resources and economic network which only political control over territories could furnish. Third, they underlined the significance of territory in terms of national defence (in Europe) and living space, two elements that were considered by them as prerequisites for the survival and flourishing of the nation.

On the theoretical level, these four different arguments produced a number of expansionist ideologies, each attempting to combine as many objectives as possible but with divergent priorities and prescriptions. In Italy, the extent of emigration throughout the period up to 1914 gave precedence to the *migrationist* argument, which prescribed the acquisition of territory for settlement and agricultural exploitation⁵⁴. At the same time, a geopolitical argument, based on considerations of national defence, emphasised the importance of territorial expansion along both coasts of the Mediterranean. This was seen as particularly urgent, since the other powers (Britain, France, Germany) were gradually acquiring stronger positions in the region. Furthermore, international developments influenced the focus of Italian

⁵² For a discussion of the two arguments see Wehler, “Bismarck’s Imperialism”, pp. 185-9

⁵³ Kitchen, pp. 180-99; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 8ff. Cf. similar references in the NSDAP Programme of 1920, in Feder, G., *Das Programm der NSDAP und seine weltanschaulichen Grundlagen* (Munich 1932)

⁵⁴ On Crispi’s conversion to Africanism see Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 6-8, 17-24. See also Lowe, Marzari, pp. 56-7

expansionist aspirations. Considerations of prestige and the historic ties of Italy with the Balkan area placed emphasis on economic expansion in the region to fill the vacuum caused by the decline of the Ottoman empire. This “industrial imperialism”, which supported economic infiltration in the Balkans⁵⁵, was linked to security considerations (control of the Adriatic) and was regarded as a prelude to political control in the event of an Ottoman collapse⁵⁶. In a similar manner, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Habsburgs in 1908 re-focused the interest of Italian nationalism on the Adriatic region⁵⁷, in the same way that the acquisition of Tunisia by France in 1883 and the two Moroccan crises had increased the Mediterranean tendencies in Italian expansionist ideology.

In Germany, the chasm between colonial and continental expansionist ideologies had been significantly more deep-rooted and with a stronger symbolic dimension than in Italy. It had been a conflict between two incompatible visions: Germany as a continental great-power, on the one hand, and Germany as a world power, on the other. It had also been a clash between the concepts of a central/eastern European empire (*Mitteleuropa*) and of a vast African network of colonies (*Mittelafrika*)⁵⁸; between the traditional prestige of the army (linked to European expansion) and the emerging prestige of the navy (associated with *Weltpolitik*). Attempts were made to synthesise economic with political expansion⁵⁹. For example, the exponents of the vague notion of *Mitteleuropa* never resolved how much economic infiltration or territorial annexation was required for its attainment⁶⁰. At the same time, the advocates of each argument, while criticising the other ideologies for their priorities, never completely espoused one type of expansion. Emphasis on expansion and settlement in Europe did not exclude interest in similar prospects in

⁵⁵ For the definition of this term see Webster, pp. 3-5

⁵⁶ For the moderate success of the Italian enterprises in expanding in the Balkan region see Webster, pp. 290ff; Bosworth, *Approach of First World War*, pp. 108-16. For the difficulties in competing against other European giants see Zamagni, V., *The Economic History of Italy, 1860-1990* (Oxford 1993), pp. 110ff

⁵⁷ Saladino, “Italy”, pp. 240ff

⁵⁸ Smith, W. D., pp. 140f

⁵⁹ Smith, W. D., Ch. 7

⁶⁰ For the concept and economic-territorial aspects of *Mitteleuropa* see Meyer, H. C., *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague 1955); Stirk, P. (ed.), *Mitteleuropa: History and Perspectives* (Edinburgh 1994); Lichtheim, pp. 62-7; Chickering, p. 268; Kaiser, D., “Germany and the Origins of the First World War”, *Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 456-7

Africa. Similarly, economic infiltration in central Europe could be complemented with related plans in central and south Africa. Even in the clash between economic and territorial expansion it was often acknowledged that one form was more suitable than the other in certain areas or under specific circumstances⁶¹. Again with reference to *Mitteleuropa*, the exponents of territorial conquest had initially to respect the need for continental stability and for the integrity of the Habsburg Empire. Thus, they could argue in favour of economic expansion as a temporary measure which could be translated into political control in more favourable future circumstances, given that the Dual Monarchy was another “sick man of Europe”. Everything came down to *priorities*, i.e. a question of which area or mode of expansion would be more beneficial in the long term for economic development and the great-power aspirations of the country⁶².

These confrontations between different expansionist programmes were evident in the official foreign policies of the Italian and German states. They explain to a great extent the plurality of expansionist strategies, the oscillations of the governments and the divisions in the radical nationalist camp in the period up to the First World War. Domestic and international developments of the last decade before 1914, however, had an impact upon the ideology and practice of expansionism in the two countries. Three major changes may be identified. First, the view that espoused colonial expansion as substitute for the territorial stalemate in Europe was gradually reversed. The strength of alliances and the prestige of each nation in the continental system became the primary factors which could guarantee power, security and the preconditions for expansion abroad. In Italy, this trend was manifested in two different developments. On the one hand, the focus of Italian colonialism shifted from the distant regions of south-eastern Africa to the Mediterranean area, towards the northern coast of Africa, the Aegean Sea and its islands. Strictly speaking, this was still expansion in colonial terms, an attempt to divert the pressure for territorial conquest away from the European system. Yet, it was also expansion in an area crucial for Italy’s strategic position in Europe, indispensable for the control of the

⁶¹ For an overview of the different opinions see Fischer, *War of Illusions*, pp. 275ff

⁶² See, for example, Bernhardt’s priority to European expansion [von Bernhardt, esp. pp. 131-57]. Cf. Weber’s priority to colonial expansion in quest for “elbowroom” [Mayer, J. P., *Max Weber and German Politics* (London 1943)]

Adriatic and for winning relative advantage against Britain and France in the Mediterranean basin. On the other hand, after 1908 the domestic consensus for Italy's participation in the Triple Alliance suffered a severe blow. The renewal of the treaty in 1912 was not actually criticised by the radical nationalist groups (the sole exception were the Irredentists), but this consent reflected less of an unqualified support for the spirit of the Alliance, and more a grudging realisation that, at that time, there was no diplomatic alternative open to the Italian government⁶³.

In Germany, a similar trend became predominant immediately before and after the second Moroccan crisis. The priority of continental expansion over colonialism had long been advocated by the radical nationalist organisations⁶⁴. In the context of this logic, the Tangier crisis indeed had a colonial function, reflecting Germany's long-standing aspirations in the Congo basin⁶⁵. Yet, this was not the primary consideration which ignited the incident. The diplomatically isolated Reich attempted to stir up colonial antagonism in north-west Africa in order to break the British-French front and consolidate its political position in the European system against its main rivals. The crisis, however, had exactly the opposite effect. It increased tension between Germany and the other European states, and strengthened the continental, annexationist arguments as the prerequisite for national prestige, security and strength of the Reich⁶⁶. In the Moroccan crisis of 1911, the Navy proved incapable of securing the international interests of the nation. The Army, on the other hand, grasped the opportunity of this alleged failure in order to press for more funds and a primary role in foreign policy-making⁶⁷. The clamour for a military confrontation increased, the *Weltpolitik* objectives subsided; and an aggressive form of continental foreign policy gained the upper hand⁶⁸.

⁶³ See "Triplice Alleanza", in Levi, F., Levra, U., Tranfaglia, N. (eds.), *Storia d'Italia* (Florence 1978), vol. 3, pp. 1318-32

⁶⁴ Craig, *Germany*, pp. 328ff

⁶⁵ For the importance of the Congo basin for the realisation of the *Mittelafrika* vision see Stoecker, H., "The Quest for 'German Central Africa'", in Stoecker (ed.), *German Imperialism in Africa*, pp. 249-61; Henderson, pp. 93ff; Smith, W. D., pp. 68f

⁶⁶ Lichtheim, pp. 81f

⁶⁷ Craig, *Germany*, pp. 287f, 294ff; Fischer, *From Kaiserreich*, pp. 48f. On the importance of the War Council of 1912 for army expenditure see Mommsen, "Debate on German War Aims", pp. 47ff; Fischer, *War of Illusions*, pp. 161ff

⁶⁸ Chickering, pp. 267-8; Fischer, *From Kaiserreich*, pp. 48f; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 318f; Eley, "Conservatives and Radical Nationalists", pp. 100-1

The second major change pertained to the shifting character of Italian and German expansionist policies. The previous balance between economic infiltration and annexationism was disturbed by the growing need for prestige and the difficulties related to economic expansion itself. The domestic crisis of the two systems in the years immediately preceding 1914 necessitated impressive victories which the subtlety of informal imperialism did not provide. This, in conjunction with the objective difficulties for the “late-comers” in catching up with the position of the other great powers in areas of economic confrontation, gradually discredited economic infiltration as an alternative to territorial conquest. Italy and Germany continued their efforts at informal expansion, the former mainly in the Balkans and Asia Minor, the latter in central and southern Europe as well as in northern Africa⁶⁹, but the symbolic significance of territory gradually gained currency. Arguments in favour of living space, for demographic, economic and defensive reasons prevailed in the expansionist discourse of the two countries. The decision of Giolitti to sanction the campaign for the acquisition of Libya provides evidence for this shift towards annexationism. Far from being a colonial enthusiast, but aware of the need to manifest Italy’s power in a tangible manner, the architect of Liberal Italy succumbed to the growing emotive attraction of territorial expansion, regardless of the minimal tangible benefits promised by the venture.

The example of the Libyan campaign highlights the third change in Italian and German expansionist politics in the period immediately before the First World War - the loss of the practical character of the expansionist objectives. Both the Libyan campaign and the Tangier crisis reflected an unconditional hunger for territory in strategic and prestige terms, in complete defiance of material considerations⁷⁰. The *ex post facto* arguments for settlement prospects and economic opportunities in the areas claimed reflected less and less the genuine motives behind the decisions to expand. This was not simply the result of the “late-comers”’ limited margins for expansion in a world almost completely occupied by the traditional great

⁶⁹ Webster, pp. 244-332; Stoecker, pp. 195ff

⁷⁰ Webster, p. 203, and pp. 246-7, for the limited possibilities for Libya’s economic exploitation; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 20-32; Thayer, pp. 254f. For the views of contemporary analysts on Libya’s limited benefits see Gregory, J. W., “Cyrenaica”, *Geographical Journal*, 47 (1916), pp. 321-45

powers. It was mainly the outcome of the growing impression that geopolitical advantage and prestige were the keys to power in a highly competitive international system. Understandably, economic infiltration could not satisfy this illusion; nor could the degree of usefulness of a territory for settlement or economic development overshadow the need for territorial expansion in any possible direction and at every opportunity.

V: Conclusions

In concluding, we need to ask a crucial question: how did the developments of pre-World War I Italian and German expansionism affect the formulation of fascist expansionist ideology and practice? The answer may be categorised in three long-term tendencies initiated in the pre-1918 period which influenced interwar development of territorial politics in the two countries. First, the pattern of state-formation followed in Italy and Germany, belated and based on annexations to a central unit, guaranteed the long-term symbolic significance of territory for domestic prosperity, national prestige and great-power status. This tendency was further strengthened by the experience of the First World War and by the territorial redistribution following the conclusion of hostilities in 1918. Second, the shift in the Italian and German foreign policies to an aggressive expansionist agenda in the years immediately before the war transformed the context and style of the two countries' territorial politics. The traditional arguments (colonialism, living space, irredentism) acquired a series of confrontational implications, thus paving the way for the fierce territorial antagonism among the European states before and during the First World War.

Third, the experience of war generated new opportunities and justifications for what each of the two countries regarded as *legitimate* territorial expansion. For Italy, the irredentist claims against the Dual Monarchy, although previously sacrificed for the sake of the stability of the Triple Alliance, appeared at the forefront of the Italian expansionist aspirations. This altered priorities to such an extent that the Italian state considered that any postwar territorial solution without substantial

frontier adjustments in the north (Brenner) and east (Dalmatia, Istria) would be incomplete, humiliating and unjust. Germany, on the other hand, entered the war with plans for eastward and westward expansion alike without having indisputably decided on geographical priorities. In contrast to the traditional Prussian policy, especially after 1815, of expansion in central and eastern Europe, Wilhelminian foreign policy never established clear geopolitical priorities, deeply divided between *Weltpolitik* and continental expansion. In this sense, the German First World War campaigns in the east re-established the priority to eastern expansion, but did so to an extent which went significantly beyond traditional Prussian ambitions and plans. The collapse of the Tsarist empire and the subsequent treaty of Brest-Litovsk established the eastern territories as Germany's living space *par excellence* and as a vast area of opportunity for German large-scale expansion. For both countries, war, the territorial aspirations invested in the campaign, the conquests and losses, all created new opportunities, new necessities and new priorities for the two late-comers' future expansion. This transformation affected postwar political decision-making but, most significantly, forged a new territorial utopia which fascism could effectively manipulate and radicalise as a *leitmotif* for future expansion.



CHAPTER 2

Fascist ideology and expansion

I: Introduction

The concept of “fascist ideology” has become the focus of a heated controversy among researchers of fascism. The challenges to the validity of the concept have originated from the enigmatic nature of both its components: “fascism” and “ideology”. With regard to the former, there are a number of questions of definition. Is there any meaning in, and need for, a generic notion of “fascism”?¹ Are we entitled to use the term as a generic ideal-type for the analysis of two such disparate regimes and value-systems as Italian Fascism and German Nazism, or even such different countries historically, culturally and socio-economically? Could we derive a fascist “ideological minimum” which justifies the comparative use of the term for describing common fundamental characteristics of the two regimes? If we now add to these questions about fascism the problems involved in a working definition of ideology, then the questions about “fascist ideology” become even more perplexing. Does “fascism” as a value-system and worldview (*Weltanschauung*) qualify as ideology? Were the leader’s views an accurate reflection of collective “fascist” values or did they evolve in contradiction to other fascists’ views. If we trace a set of ideas, long-term objectives and implements for their attainment in the

¹ Mason, T., “Whatever Happened to ‘Fascism’”, in Childers, T., Caplan, J. (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York, London 1993), pp. 253-62; Allardyce, G., “What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept”, *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), pp. 367-88; Wilford, R., “Fascism”, in Eccleshall, R., Geoghegan, V., Jay, R., Kenny, M., MacKenzie, I., Wilford, R. (eds.), *Political Ideologies. An Introduction* (London & New York 1994, 2nd ed.), pp. 185-217. See also, in this study, Introduction.

practice of fascist regimes, how do we establish the relation between thought and action? Is “ideology” in fascism something more than *ex post facto* justification, in other words, does it have a normative value? And, finally, how negative, “anti”, “reactionary”, “palingenetic” or positive, original and utopian is whatever we agree that is “fascist ideology”?

The above questions are pertinent to the main objective of this chapter, namely the analysis of whether there was a generic “fascist” expansionist “ideology”, shared by the Italian and German fascist regimes. The relation between *ideas* and *actions* in the foreign policies of the two regimes has become a point of fierce debate ever since the end of the Second World War. R. De Felice’s use of Mussolini’s speeches and writings as literal reflections of his intentions has led to exaggerations and failed to distinguish between consistent themes and *ad hoc* inconsistent elements in the *Duce*’s pronouncements. The same rigidity in treating Hitler’s speeches and books pervades the most extreme “Hitler-centric” approaches to Nazism, which overstate his personal contribution to Nazi ideology². Absolute emphasis on the personal obsessions of Mussolini and Hitler as the only *source* of fascist expansionist ideology has deprived fascism of its historical relevance to the post-unification structures and developments in Italy and Germany³. If we agree upon a certain *ideological* nature of fascist expansionist policies, then this “ideology” cannot be located exclusively in individuals, even individuals of such symbolic dimensions as

² Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini*, Part 2: *Il fascista*, vol. 1 : *Il conquista del potere, 1925-29* (Turin 1966), pp. 464ff. For a criticism of his literal use of sources see Bosworth, R. J. B., *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and perspectives in the interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London 1998), pp. 17-25, 96-8. For Germany see Jäckel, E., *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen 1969); and Kershaw, I., *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London 1989, 2nd edition), Ch. 5

³ On the special role of Hitler in Nazi foreign policy see Bracher, K. D., “The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation”, in Laqueur, W., *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 193-212; Hildebrand, K., “Hitlers Ort in der Geschichte der preussisch-deutschen Nationalstaates”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 217 (1973), pp. 584-632; *ibid.*, “Monokratie oder Polykratie? Hitlers Herrschaft und das Dritte Reich”, in Hirschfeld, G., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *Der ‘Führerstaat’: Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart 1981), pp. 73-97; Jäckel, E., *Hitler in History* (Hanover & London 1987). The importance of Mussolini’s role for the stability and dynamism of Italian fascism is discussed by Melograni, P., “The Cult of the *Duce* in Mussolini’s Italy”, in Mosse, G. L. (ed.), *International Fascism. New Thought and New Approaches* (London & Beverley Hills 1979), pp. 73-90. For a more detailed reference to the problem of leadership in fascism see below, Chs. 4, 7

the *Duce* and the *Führer*⁴. The tendency to view fascism as a “demonic” repudiation or aberration of history might have served the instinctive need to castigate it morally but it has also obscured its relevance to the secular ideological and political traditions of post-unification Italian and German societies⁵. The tremendous appeal of fascist ideas to wider social audiences and strata may only partly be explained away by the charismatic nature of the two fascist leaders. What rendered fascism an intelligible system of thought was also the ability of Mussolini and Hitler to assimilate and systematise a series of pre-existing beliefs and values, effectively updating them with the experience of the First World War and thus linking past and present with a positive vision for the immediate future. On the other hand, the non-ideological, “opportunistic” interpretation of fascist expansion has reduced the ideological declarations of the fascist leaders to the status of *ad hoc* justifications, devoid of any normative power. A. J. P. Taylor rejected Hitler’s words as evidence of real intentions or tools for understanding his decisions. In a similar vein, G. Salvemini portrayed Mussolini as constantly improvising and superior to Hitler in the art of propaganda - a view shared by other subsequent historians of Italian Fascism⁶. In this way, however, the *mythic*, quasi-religious, millenarian aspects of fascism are reduced to the level of vulgar propaganda, deprived of any significance for understanding the dynamism of fascist expansion and the derivation of its large-scale goals. Both leaders emphasised the function of fascism as a new *faith* for the nations which promised a secularised utopia. Their pronouncements comprised a plethora of symbols and metaphors as part of an imagery of salvation and triumph for their nations. Although their discourse was not devoid of manipulative propaganda, it comprised a series of themes, interpretations and prescriptions which had been consistently employed from the period of the two movements’ incubation until the final collapse in 1943-45. In this sense, it is essential to investigate the impact of

⁴ The notion that one person alone can be responsible for the production of an ideological system (and especially of fascist ideology) is adequately criticised by Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York 1994), pp. 16-7; Mannheim, K., *Ideology and Utopia* (London 1966), pp. 189f

⁵ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 29-32; Eatwell, R., “Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism”, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4 (1992), pp. 161-94; Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship*, pp. 99ff

⁶ Salvemini, G., *Prelude to the Second World War* (London 1953), pp. 9ff; Vivarelli, R., “Benito Mussolini dal socialismo al fascismo”, *Rivista storica italiana*, 79 (1967), pp. 438-58; Denis Mack

these ideological elements on the two regimes' foreign policies and determine to what extent they underpinned fascism's commitment to radical, large-scale expansionist goals or were manipulated in order to justify a blind policy of territorial aggrandisement.

On a comparative level, the debate has been dominated by an emphasis on the unique elements of Nazi expansionist policies (i.e. terror, racism, especially anti-Semitism) which set apart the German from the Italian - and all the other potentially "fascist" - cases. There has also been a challenge to the idea that territorial expansionism should be regarded as a core element of fascist "ideology" and political practice. While *Lebensraum*-oriented expansion has been widely seen as central to the Nazi worldview⁷, Italian Fascism has been alleged to lack clear expansionist visions and the determination to pursue aggressive policies, leading to an eventual enslavement to the dynamism of Nazi territorial ambitions⁸. Hitler, Rosenberg, Himmler and even von Ribbentrop have been credited with a solid ideological background in their political practice⁹. This is something that has only occasionally been granted to Mussolini, or to independent-minded Fascists such as Gentile, Bottai, Balbo and Grandi. The Italian Fascist leadership has consistently been portrayed as unable to produce a systematic ideological ethos for their regime, as being simply determined to exploit the emotive power of expansion to consolidate its domestic

Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London & New York 1976), pp. 15-6, and *Mussolini* (London 1981)

⁷ See, for example, Trevor-Roper, H., *The Testament of Adolf Hitler. The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945* (London 1961); Hildebrand, K., *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London 1972); "Hitlers 'Programm' und seine Realisierung", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland, und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 63-93; "Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der deutschen Aussenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler", in Hillgruber (ed.), *Grossmachtpolitik und Militarismus im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf 1974), pp. 212-44; Hillgruber, A., *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung, 1940-1941* (Frankfurt 1965)

⁸ Salvemini, *Prelude*; Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis* (London 1966). This problem is discussed in this study, Ch. 5

⁹ A general discussion of the ideas that these, and other, figures of the Nazi regime held is provided by Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993); Fest, J., *The Face of Third Reich* (London 1970). Additionally, a number of biographies have focused on the special ideological beliefs of the Nazi leaders. See, for example, Heiber, H., *Goebbels* (New York 1972); Overy, R. J., *Göring: The 'Iron Man'* (London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley 1984); Padfield, P., *Himmler: Reichsführer-SS* (London & Basingstoke 1990); Segrè, C. G., *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1987); Cordova, F. (ed.), *Uomini e volti del fascismo* (Rome 1980)

position¹⁰. Thus, the idea of a generic fascist expansionist ideology has been undermined in two ways. First, the emphasis on the atypical manifestations of Nazi expansionist policies (terror, destruction, genocide) has extracted territorial expansion from the core of a fascist paradigm. Second, the excessive character of Nazi expansionist policies, in style, in dynamism, determination, and finally in effectiveness and brutality, have established territorial expansion as an ideological *sine qua non* only of the German regime, as its ultimate goal and reason that sets it apart from the Italian case¹¹. In this sense, the Nazi *raison d' être* has been equated with "total" war, annihilation and genocide of an unprecedented character, and this has been regarded as a major reason for discarding any attempt to produce a concept of generic "fascist ideology", or at least one including Nazi Germany. By contrast, our view of Italian Fascism has been dominated by a historiographical tendency to depict both the Italian Fascist regime (and the Italian people as a whole) as culturally opposed to the brutality and inhumanity which informed the policies of the Nazi regime and were dutifully never contradicted by the majority of the population¹².

The aim of this chapter is to examine whether an ideologically conditioned propensity for expansion was indeed a generic characteristic of fascism, derived from a common core of axioms in the ideologies of the two regimes. Clearly, the attempt to produce a generic framework for fascist expansionist ideology is impeded by the diversity of style, scope, methods and short-term goals in Italian and German expansionist policies. It is, therefore, essential to provide a re-definition of what we regard as the ideological "minimum" of fascist expansion¹³. The emphasis on *atypical* elements (the "demonising", genocidal, anti-Semitic aspects of Nazi

¹⁰ See, for example, Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini* (London 1981); Hibbert, C., *Benito Mussolini* (London 1975)

¹¹ The alleged difference between the "traditional, imperialistic" expansion of the Italian regime and the "racialist" expansionist ideology of Nazism has been overemphasised as a generic difference between the two regimes by a number of authors. See, for example, Turner, H. A. "Fascism and Modernisation", in Turner (ed.), *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York 1975), pp. 117-39; Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, p. 40; Mosse, G. L., "Towards a General Theory of Fascism", in Mosse (ed.), *International Fascism. New Thoughts and New Approaches* (London & Beverly Hills 1979), pp. 34f; Payne, S. G., *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison 1980), pp. 101ff; Perfetti, P. (ed.), *Il dibattito sul fascismo* (Rome 1984), pp. 12-3

¹² For this debate see Bosworth, *Italian Dictatorship*, pp. 100-5; Steinberg, J., *All or Nothing. The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-42* (London 1990); Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 231-5

¹³ Sternhell, Z., *Neither Right nor Left. Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1986), pp. 18f. See also Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, Ch. 1

expansionism, on the one hand; and the alleged opportunist, unsystematic character of Italian Fascist foreign policy on the other) has blurred the similarities in a set of ideas and long-term objectives shared by the two regimes. The expansionist tendencies of the two movements and regimes rested upon comparable perceptions of their place and role in national and European history. They were derived from a nucleus of crucial, somewhat neglected, ideological constants: a notion of political, national and racial elitism; a perception of violence as a rejuvenating and revolutionary force; a determination to unite ideas and utopias with uncompromising action; a belief in the historic role of fascism as the force to complete national unification and to introduce a new stage in human civilisation. This chapter investigates how each of the two regimes expressed these ideological denominators in the context of its distinct national historic, political and social experience.

II. Fascist ideology and the analysis of the past: the “self-historicisation” of fascism

Fascist ideology and the liberal past

One of the most common criticisms against the validity of fascism as “ideology” has been its negative, reactionary, “anti-” character¹⁴. This charge, implying the lack of an original, autonomous and long-term perspective, has been based on the perception of fascism as an ideology of crisis, defined by its oppositional attitude to established beliefs rather than on a novel conceptual core. The “negative” character of fascism originated from the context of interwar crisis and polarisation which defined its negative, confrontational, myopic principles and

¹⁴ Linz, J. J., “Some notes towards a comparative study of fascism in sociological historical perspective”, in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979); Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 4-8; Malaparte, C., “Mussolini and National Syndicalism”, in Lyttelton, A. (ed.), *Italian Fascisms from Pareto to Gentile* (London 1973), pp. 225-41 (esp. 229-31). For a treatment of fascist ideology as a “positive” phenomenon, see Gregor, A. J., *The Ideology of Fascism. The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York 1969); Mosse, “General Theory”, pp. 1-41. An interesting implication of this general trend was the perception of the PNF as an “anti-party”, in its negation of all other existing political forms. See Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 70f, and, for a contemporary definition of fascism as an anti-party, in Gioda, M., “L’anti-partito”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 10-2-1919. Cf. the notion of “anti-state”, in Mussolini, B., “Stato, anti-stato e fascismo”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 29.6.1922.

credos. It was also condemned to limited originality, since the "space" for ideological novelty had long been occupied by other major ideological trends¹⁵. In this sense, the argument goes, fascism, whether in Italy or Germany, was required by external factors to offer a negative, or even nihilist, view of history, with its principles defined in opposition to established truths rather than in accordance with a new teleology.

Postwar research on fascism has endeavoured to present it, whether generically or in its individual expressions, as a distinct phenomenon which does not fall under the "ideal types" of modern ideological and political phenomena. "Sonderweg"¹⁶, "revolution of nihilism"¹⁷, "anti-ideology", are but a few of the neologisms that have been employed to criticise the alleged "trivialisation" of fascism. It goes against the grain to grant fascist ideology a *positive* character, not least because this long-term utopia presupposed destruction and use of violence as its major instruments. This assumption, however, should not reduce fascist expansionism to a mere "anti-", destructive phenomenon. For all its negations - and they were numerous¹⁸ - fascism established its own unique teleological version of history as a process of re-birth and re-juvenation, and presented itself as an integral part of the post-unification history of the two countries¹⁹. As with any other ideological system, it offered a novel interpretation of the past (descriptive aspect) and provided a long-term normative platform for the future (prescriptive aspect), prioritising goals and justifying methods and practices²⁰. The "negative" experience of the recent past, both on the national and international levels, was incorporated in the fascist vision as the necessary stage of collapse before renaissance. In this sense,

¹⁵ Linz, J. J., "Political Space and Fascism as Late-Comer", in Larsen, S. U., Hagtvet, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1980), pp. 153-189, and "Some Notes", pp. 14-20; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 209ff

¹⁶ For a criticism of the validity of this concept see Maier, C., *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge Mass. 1988), pp. 102-8; Puhle, H.-J., "Deutscher Sonderweg. Kontroverse um eine vermeintliche Legende", *Journal für Geschichte*, 4 (1981), pp. 44ff; Roseman, M., "National Socialism and Modernisation", in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 199f, 220f

¹⁷ Rauschning, H., *The Revolution of Nihilism* (New York 1939), passim

¹⁸ Linz, "Some Notes", pp. 29ff. Cf. Malaparte, C., *Europa Vivente. Teoria storica del sindacalismo nazionale* (Florence 1961), an excerpt of which is translated in Griffin, R. (ed.), *Fascism* (Oxford & New York 1995), pp. 48-9

¹⁹ Casucci, C., "Fascismo e storia", *Il Mulino*, 9 (1960), pp. 213-42; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, Ch. 2

²⁰ On the interrelation between the descriptive and the normative aspects of ideology see Thompson, J. B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge 1984), pp. 73-90; Smith, W. D., *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford 1986), pp. 13-20. See also, in this study, Introduction.

the “anti-” and “re-” elements of fascist cosmology were dovetailed in a *biological* perception of history as a process of birth, triumph, collapse and re-birth. The decline of the old order, reaching its climax in the war and the interwar crisis, became the necessary historical platform, upon which the positive fascist vision for the future was constructed²¹.

These “positive” aspects of fascist ideology were strengthened with the evolution of Fascism and Nazism from protest movements into organised political parties seeking power. The promise of short-term change had to be complemented with a design for long-term salvation from the national and international forces of “decay”. In order, however, to make this design intelligible and appealing to broader sections of public opinion, fascism had to devise a way to place itself in historical context. The self-historicisation of fascism rested upon a definition of its role with regard to three levels of “time”. The first was a micro-historic dimension, portraying fascism as the counter-current to recent national degeneration. This antithetical aspect of fascism defined its characteristics as a negation of the qualities of the “old order”. This negation was indispensable, so that the emerging fascist movements could justify their “rejuvenating” function. The second level was related to a macro-historic perception of national history, in an attempt to present fascism as an integral part of the nation’s collective memories, traditions and aspirations. This task entailed its incorporation in the historic process initiated by unification (1859-71 and 1866-70 respectively), and the linking of its short-term functions (the first level, above) to the unfulfilled long-term ambitions of the resurrected nation. The third level involved an extension of fascism’s historic role to a universal ethical context. In portraying itself as a new stage of European civilisation, engaged in a fight against all forms of moral and political decadence, fascism emerged as a novel, “positive” utopia. Fascist ideology complemented the short-term negation of degeneration with an appealing eschatology for the nation (completion of unification) and the world (a new universal morality).

We will deal with the ethical-universal aspect of fascist ideology later in the chapter. What is of immediate interest is to show how fascist expansionist ideology was located in the context of the short- and long-term developments of the post-

²¹ Bubenden, F. (ed.), *Gesammelte Briefe von Albert Leo Schlageter* (Berlin 1934), pp. 70ff

unification national histories of Italy and Germany. This task involved, first of all, the invention of a symbolic watershed, a chronological point or period which pushed the old, decadent forces to a state of collapse and generated the rejuvenating dynamism of the fascist movements. In Italy, this turning point coincided with the period between the emergence of the *intervento* (1914) and what the Fascists perceived as the real collapse of liberalism in 1918-20²². During that period, the ideological mentors of Italian fascism located the origins of the Fascist postwar *raison d'être* in three separate developments. The first, and the only positive one, was the formation of the *intervento* bloc as a national reaction to the inertia of the liberal "oligarchy"²³. Mussolini saw in the events of 1914-15 the first political expression of the revolutionary qualities of "new" Italy: the vision of a great nation, both territorially and politically, redeemed in its internal life and ready to embark on a "permanent revolution"²⁴. This vision was not limited to the reconfiguration of the national spiritual forces prior to the war, but was solidified by the collective experience of the battlefield²⁵. The eventual overturning of the liberal ideology of *parecchio* in May 1915 signified the triumph of the new era of imperialism, national grandeur and idealistic activism in its historic antithesis to the liberal *vecchiaia*²⁶. War in itself became the source of an *apocalypse*, a new secular religion of the nation, based on the revelation of its unique destiny which permeated Fascism's later ultra-nationalist millenarianism²⁷. Prominent members of the *intervento* movement, among them Papini and Malaparte, saw the First World War as the symbolic beginning of a long struggle for the "new" Italy's domestic transformation and

²² Mussolini, B., *Scritti e Discorsi* (Firenze 1934-1939, henceforward cited as *Scritti*), II, pp. 47-9 ("Speculazioni e responsabilità", *Popolo d'Italia*, 25 November 1919)

²³ Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 74f; Casucci, "Fascismo e storia", pp. 225ff

²⁴ Susmel, E. Susmel, D. (eds.), *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini* (Florence & Rome 1951-78, henceforward cited as *OO*), VII, 197, 394, 418. See also Gentile, E., *Il mito dello stato nuovo* (Bari 1982), Ch. 6; De Grand, A. J., "Curzio Malaparte: The Illusion of Fascist Revolution", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7 (1972), pp. 73-90

²⁵ Marinetti, F. T., "The War as the Catharsis of Italian society", translated and cited in Griffin, R., *Fascism* (Oxford & New York 1995), pp. 25-6; Guerri, J. B., "Bottai: da intellettuale futurista a leader fascista", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *Futurismo, cultura e politica* (Turin 1986), pp. 223-4. See also *OO*, X, 140-1

²⁶ *OO*, VII, 78-9

²⁷ Gentile, E., *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome & Bari 1993), pp. 108ff

international ascendancy²⁸. Even the traumatic Italian defeat at Caporetto in 1917 was depicted as an essential act of martyrdom on the way to spiritual catharsis²⁹. This was the nadir in the decay of the “old” Italy, both militarily and spiritually, as well as the beginning of a truly “national” war. The experience of fighting to liberate Italian lands, to repel enemy forces and avenge the defeat united people of all regions and social strata in what Mussolini called in December 1917 “the brutal apprenticeship of the trenches”³⁰. It also revealed to the soldiers their collective identity as defenders of the common cultural and historic ideal of a reborn Italy. The experience of war succeeded, according to Mussolini, where the *Risorgimento* had failed - in instilling a common sense of national pride to the Italian people, displacing the previous diverse regional identities by the ideal of “citizen-soldier” (*cittadino-soldato*) of the nation³¹. What followed Caporetto, he added, showed to the world that that Italians could wage a brave national war, that they were indeed the worthy inheritors of the historic Roman civilisation and that the process of “making the Italians” had entered its final, decisive stage³². The task of the Fascist “revolution”, as he stressed in numerous occasions during the 1920s, was to unite the nation under the authority of a new, all-encompassing state³³. In Fascist Italy there would be no division between regions, between north and south; there would be only Italians united “at the heart of the fatherland”³⁴.

²⁸ Malaparte, *Europa Vivente*, pp. 93ff; Papini, G., “The War as a Source of National Renewal”, in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 23-4

²⁹ For the importance of war in general see Ciccardini, B., “Il fascismo come esame di coscienza delle generazioni”, *Terza Generazione*, 3 (1954), pp. 39-44, reprinted in Casucci, C. (ed.), *Il fascismo: Antologia di scritti critici* (Bologna 1982), pp. 489-502

³⁰ OO, X, 140ff (“Trincerocrazia” in *Popolo d'Italia*, 15 December 1917); an excerpt is translated in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 28-9

³¹ Mosse, G. L., “Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), pp.491-514; Isnenghi, M., “Il mito di potenza”, in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. C. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 144f

³² For the importance of Caporetto see Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London 1996), pp. 33ff; Hamilton, A., *The Appeal of Fascism. A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919-1945* (London 1971), pp. 16ff. For Mussolini’s comments see Scritti, I, 320-1 (“La vittoria fatale”, speech in Bologna, 24 May 1918); II, 11ff (“Discorso da ascoltare”, *Popolo d'Italia*, 1 May 1919)

³³ OO, XXI, 359 (“Intransigenza assoluta”, speech to the Fascist Congress in Rome, 21 June 1925)

³⁴ OO, XVII, 218 (“Programma fascista”, 8 November 1921). Cf. XXIV, 9f (speech to the Assembly of the Regime, 10 March 1929); XXIV, 227-8 (speech in Livorno, 11 May 1930)

Linked to this positive development were the other two negative origins: the postwar peace settlement and the rapid decline of the Giolittian system after 1918³⁵. The unsatisfactory territorial gains from the treaties of Versailles, Trianon and Rapallo provided the *intervento* movement with a new point to rally its disparate ideological and social forces. The so-called “minimalist” solution to Italy’s territorial claims in the Adriatic (excluding Fiume and other parts not inhabited by ethnic Italian majorities) was regarded by the Fascist leadership as an artificial, arbitrary denial of the status that the country had achieved through her participation in the First World War³⁶. The resurrection of the Italian nation during, and because of, the war warranted the annexation of vast areas, established as historically and geographically Italian³⁷. This claim was significantly more than naked imperialism, it was argued. It was the ultimate consecration of the Italian victory which emerged from the apocalyptic vision of a “new” Italy³⁸.

In this respect, the liberal system failed to acknowledge the historic significance of the *intervento* and the war experience. Mussolini saw the vindication of his *intervento* rhetoric in Giolitti’s belated recognition that Italy’s participation in the war had promoted long-term national interests³⁹. Yet, for the Fascists the war was not over in 1918⁴⁰. Liberalism proved itself incapable of responding to the new realities, especially in its incompetent representation of the nation at the peace negotiations⁴¹. The myth of *vittoria mutilata* and the violent suppression of the *dannunzianismo* in Fiume were further manipulated by the leadership of the *Fasci* to

³⁵ For the importance of the Peace Treaties see, in this study, Ch. 4, Section II. For the collapse of the Giolittian system see Casucci, “Fascismo e storia”, pp. 238ff; Gentile, E., “From the Cultural Revolt of the Giolittian era to the Ideology of Fascism”, in Coppa, F. J. (ed.), *Studies in Modern Italian History: From Risorgimento to the Republic* (New York 1986), pp. 103-19

³⁶ Scritti, II, 16-7 (“Annessione”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 24 April 1919), 52 (“Navigare Necesse” in *Popolo d’Italia*, 1 January 1920); Mack Smith, *Guerre di Duce*, pp. 18f; Forges Davanzati, E., “L’Italia fa da se”, *Idea Nazionale*, 23.4.1919

³⁷ Scritti, II, 111 (“Ciò che rimane e ciò che verterà”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 13 November 1920); Copolla, F., *La crisi italiana* (Rome 1916), pp. 77-91

³⁸ On the nationalist and fascist conceptions of *nazione* see the two contributions of Agnelli, A., “L’idea di nazione all’inizio e nei momenti di crisi del secolo XX”, and Gentile, E., “La nazione del fascismo. Alle origini del declino dello Stato nazionale”, in Spadolini, G. (ed.), *Nazione e Nazionalità in Italia* (Rome & Bari 1994), pp. 15-32 and 65-124 respectively

³⁹ Scritti, II, 98-9 (“Discorso di Trieste”, 20 September 1920)

⁴⁰ Bottai, G., *Pagine di critica fascista*, edited by Paccas, F. M. (Florence 1941), p. 9

⁴¹ On the failure of liberalism after the First World War to respond to the feeling of aggrieved nationalism see Vivarelli, R., *Il fallimento del liberalismo* (Bologna 1981)

propagate the imagery of liberal collapse⁴². Mussolini commented sarcastically that the liberal *vecchiaia* had failed to grasp that the war and the “immense Italian victory” had established the country as a power with a universal mission and an imperial destiny⁴³. Against the defeatism and lack of ambition of Giolittism, on the one hand, and the corrupt internationalism of the socialists, on the other, Fascism developed its own ideological identity as a *terza via* between the decadent ideologies of the left and the right⁴⁴ or even as a “fourth way”, rejecting old-fashioned models of authoritarianism.

In Germany, the “turning point” was partly in the experience of the Great War itself⁴⁵, but mainly in the developments of the immediate postwar period: the 1918 Revolution, the Versailles Treaty and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. As in the case of Italy, the peace settlement became the focal point of nationalist criticism against the liberal system. However, the institution of the Republic was the epitome of what German radical nationalism opposed: it represented liberal incompetence, socialist subversion, class divisiveness and international conspiracy against the German *Volk*⁴⁶. In the interviews with early Nazis of the Abel collection, anti-Weimar feeling was one of the major factors in the NSDAP members’ decision to join the party in the 1920s. At the same time, after the experience of the 1918 revolution and left-wing agitation in the interwar period, they combined their rejection of the Republic with a deep-seated hatred of socialists and an equally fundamental anti-Semitic prejudice. The overwhelming majority of the respondents tended to identify all these negative elements with the reality of the Weimar Republic, thus investing their political opposition to liberalism with nationalist and

⁴² Scritti, II, 28-9 (“Dopo il voto”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 2 June 1919); 31-7 (speech in Florence, 9 October 1919); 55-7 (“Rinunciatori”, *Popolo d’Italia*, February 1920); 101 (speech in Trieste, 20 September 1920)

⁴³ OO, XI, 92 (May 1918); Scritti, II, 31-7 (speech in Florence, 9 October 1919). See also Knox, M., “Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany”, *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 16-8

⁴⁴ Mosse, G. L., “Towards a General Theory of Fascism”; Bobbio, N., “L’ideologia del fascismo”, reprinted in Casucci (ed.), *Antologia*, pp. 598-624 (esp. pp. 621-4)

⁴⁵ The quotation from Moeller van den Bruck, A., *Germany’s Third Empire* (New York 1971), pp. 122f

⁴⁶ Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf*, translated by R. Mannheim (London 1972), Chs. 8-10

irrational ideological beliefs in the purity and unity of the German *Volks*⁴⁷. This criticism was further strengthened by the moderate attitude of Weimar politicians towards the prospect of treaty revisions, and reached its climax during the campaign against the Young Plan in 1929⁴⁸. The grievances of the German nation in 1918-24, and then during the economic crisis of 1929-33, were exploited in Nazi rhetoric to project a positive message of national endurance, in contrast to the decaying, contaminated Weimar system⁴⁹.

The “new” German nationalism of the 1920s succeeded in transforming the negative experience of the interwar period into a positive apocalypse, from which the nation’s heroic destiny and its inevitable *Neugeburt* would emerge. At a time when the traditional nationalist forces (most notably the DNVP) were moving towards a positive, if somewhat uneasy commitment to the Republic, the forces of “new” Germany (i.e. the Nazi ideologues but also radical nationalist thinkers like Spengler, Jünger, Moeller van den Bruck and Jung) called for the “annihilation” of the Weimar experiment⁵⁰. The experience of war itself, the national grandeur it instilled into the *Volks*, the territorial dream it temporarily realised, all contributed, they claimed, to the generation of a new national conscience. This process was delayed by the conspiracy of 1918 (Revolution, “stab-in-the-back”), but could be resuscitated out of the ruins of the Republic⁵¹. The legacy of the “new” nationalism was presented as antithetical to the old perceptions of “liberal” nationalism, and to the “jingoism” of the traditional politicians⁵². It was a political religion, based on the *Lebensnotwendigkeit* of the

⁴⁷ Merkl, P. H., *Political Violence under the Swastika. 581 Early Nazis* (Princeton, New Jersey 1975), pp. 382ff, 549ff

⁴⁸ Childers, T., *The Nazi Voter. The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill & London 1983), pp. 129-38; Merkl, pp. 322ff; Feuchtwanger, E. J., *From Weimar to Hitler. Germany, 1918-1933* (Basingstoke & London 1983), pp. 205ff; Noakes, J. Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism. A Documentary Reader*, vol. I: *The Rise to Power, 1919-1933* (Exeter 1983), pp. 64-5

⁴⁹ Baynes, N. H. (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler. April 1922 - August 1939* (London, New York & Toronto 1942), vol. I, pp. 584-92 (speech in the opening of the House of German Art, 18 July 1937); Mohler, A., *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland* (Darmstadt 1972), passim; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 92f; Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 211ff. Cf. “Das Programm der NSDAP”, translated and reprinted in Griffin, *Fascism*, pp. 121-2

⁵⁰ See, for example, Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (New York 1971); Struve, W., *Elites against Democracy. Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933*, (Princeton, New Jersey 1973), p. 378; Herf, G., *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge 1984), Chs. 2-6; Hamilton, pp. 141f

⁵¹ See, for example, Juenger, E., *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin 1922)

⁵² Baynes, II, p. 1218-47 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 21 May 1935)

nation, the unique destiny of the German *Volk* and the generational conviction that a cycle of national history had been initiated by the war⁵³.

Fascism in post-unification national history: a *syncretic* ideology

The second task of fascism's short-term historicisation involved a critical assessment of the policies and worldviews which dominated the post-unification history of the two countries. This assessment rested upon a clear separation between those elements which diverted the nation from its destiny, on the one hand, and those which contributed to the revelation of the nation's role of grandeur for the future. The fascists could justify an original and historically crucial role for their movements by making a sharp break with a past which, by 1919, had been widely held as responsible for the unfortunate course of national history. This served a dual function. It made fascism ideologically intelligible by presenting it as the synthesis, continuation and reinvigoration of constructive, but unexploited forces of post-unification history⁵⁴. It also avoided the danger of a total rejection of the past as futile. Instead, fascist ideology presented the five or six decades after unification as a period of national "soul-searching", as a necessary apprenticeship which, through both its ventures and failures, paved the way for the fascist rebirth⁵⁵.

The attempt to devise a history of "proto-fascism" and to distance it from the context of the overall criticism of the pre-1914 policies was indeed a complex process. In Italy, Mussolini attacked the pusillanimous and humiliating liberal policies concentrated on the key figures of the Giolittian system: Giolitti, above all, but also Orlando and Nitti for their mishandling of the territorial negotiations after the war and their inability to grasp the changing nature of nationalist feeling in the country⁵⁶. However, the *Duce* replicated the rhetoric of the ANI (*Associazione*

⁵³ On this issue see Juenger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*; Spengler, O., *The Decline of the West* (London 1926), pp. 40ff; Moeller van den Bruck, *Third Empire*

⁵⁴ Mosse, "General Theory", p. 36; Baynes, II, p. 1129 (speech in Weimar, 1 November 1933)

⁵⁵ See Hitler's speech, quoted in Boepple, E. (ed.), *Adolf Hitlers Reden* (Munich 1933), pp. 6-21. For a general analysis of this theme see Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, Ch. 4; Mohler, p. 82

⁵⁶ Scritti, II, 75 ("Nefasto", *Popolo d'Italia*, 9 May 1920), 77-81 ("Restare a Valona", *Popolo d'Italia*, 13 June 1920); Chiurgo, G. A., *Storia della rivoluzione fascista, 1919-1922*, vol. II: *Anno 1920*

Nazionalista Italiana, Italian Nationalist Association) in excluding Crispi from the context of his anti-liberal polemics. Crispi, as the man responsible for the most prestige-oriented imperialist policy in modern Italian history, the man charged with the cost of the most opprobrious failure of Italian expansionism (Adowa, 1896), was resurrected in Fascist propaganda as the “bearer” of the great-power conscience of modern Italy⁵⁷. He was credited with the invention of a truly “Italian” - as opposed to the “Prussian” or “western” - style of imperialism⁵⁸. Mussolini also praised his intuition in pushing Italy towards the Mediterranean and Africa. This policy reflected the nation’s universal imperial destiny and was a necessity dictated by the country’s underprivileged economic, commercial and demographic conditions⁵⁹.

The abandonment of Crispi’s vision, however, by successive liberal politicians was not simply seen as a fatal miscalculation of Italy’s real needs and objectives. According to Gentile, Crispi was the torch-bearer of the *Risorgimento* tradition, the only true heir to the Mazzinian dream of “new” Italy and the ultimate exponent of the “Roman myth”⁶⁰. The romantic, spiritual ideal of a new universal empire, based on the legacy of the Eternal City, the traditions of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Gioberti, were the true guiding-principles behind Crispi’s “cultural imperialism”⁶¹. Mussolini did not interpret these policies as imperialistic in the conventional sense of the word. They were inspired by an ideal of egalitarianism

(Florence 1929), pp. 267ff; De Grand, A. J., *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism in Italy* (Lincoln & London 1978), pp. 103-5, 110. In the nationalist press see, for example, “Cinicesmo cieco”, *Idea Nazionale*, 17.9.1919; “La conferenza contro l’alleanza”, *Idea Nazionale*, 2.5.1919. For an analysis of the traditional policies of Orlando see Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 33f

⁵⁷ Scritti, II, 95 (“Discorso di Trieste”, 20 September 1920)

⁵⁸ Scritti, IV, 13-5 (“Francesco Crispi”, speech in Rome, 12 January 1924); II, 199-201 (address to the Fascist Congress of Rome, 9 November 1921). The portrayal of Italian imperialism as different from, and indeed superior to, both the “Prussian” and the “Anglo-Saxon” equivalents was a constant theme in the rhetoric of the PNF leadership. See also Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, p. 397ff; Bottai, G., “Politica coloniale ardita”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 10-5-1919

⁵⁹ Scritti, IV, 151 (speech in the Chamber of Deputies, 7 June 1924). On Mussolini’s demographic ideas, and the dangers of “overpopulation” or “demographic decadence”, see OO, XXIII, 215f (“Regresso delle nascite, morte dei popoli”, speech in Bologna, 1 September 1928); Segrè, C. G., *Fourth Shore. The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago & London 1974), pp. 3-32

⁶⁰ Gentile, G., *I Profeti del Risorgimento* (Florence 1944, 3rd edition), and “Origini e dottrina del fascismo”, in Casucci (ed.), *Antologia*, pp. 37-8; O’Sullivan, N., *Fascism* (London & Melbourne 1983), pp. 164f; Hamilton, pp. 39-43, 57-9; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 68-9. For the significance of the “myth of Rome” see later in this chapter.

⁶¹ Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, p. 396

among peoples under the spiritual and cultural domination of Rome⁶². They echoed Italy's moral and historic right to equality with the other great European nations, in political and territorial terms. In its opposition to Crispian policies after 1896, liberalism and Giolittism were presented as rejecting the long-term objectives and legacies of the *Risorgimento*. In this sense, they were historic aberrations, a parenthesis that was sealed off by the *intervento* movement and the final victory of Fascism in 1922⁶³.

On the other hand, the Fascists had been significantly more reluctant to acknowledge ideological debts to the "new" Italian nationalist movement which came to be identified with the ANI. Undoubtedly, the PNF had its own ideological mentors within its ranks: Mussolini himself, the revolutionary syndicalists⁶⁴, the Futurists⁶⁵, even D'Annunzio⁶⁶. The ANI represented a kind of nationalism that was pro-monarchical, "dynastic" and highly "ideological" - both qualities unacceptable to Fascism's early republicanism, anti-intellectualism and activism⁶⁷. In contrast, the revolutionary aspects of syndicalism and squadristism tended to focus on the need for domestic transformation which was antithetical to most nationalists' social conservatism and old-fashioned nationalism. At the same time, the ANI was widely regarded by the revolutionary wing of the PNF as part of the same "old" nationalist tradition which Fascism opposed. Despite the respect for the father-figures of Corradini, Papini and Prezzolini, the new stars of the ANI, mainly Federzoni and Rocco, had been charged with a certain "restorationism" and ideological rigidity,

⁶² OO, XVI, 128

⁶³ Boccioni, U., *Opere complete* (Foligno 1927), pp. 8ff; Volpe, G., *L'Italia in cammino* (Milan 1931, 3rd ed.), preface

⁶⁴ See, for example, Panunzio, S., "Stato e sindacalismo", *Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia del Diritto*, 3 (1923), pp. 4-9, translated and reprinted in Griffin, *Fascism*, pp. 46-8. For an analysis of the ideology of revolutionary syndicalism in Italy see Sternhell, Z., *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton 1994), pp. 131-59

⁶⁵ On the political significance of the Futurist Movement see Zapponi, N., "Futurismo e fascismo", and Gentile, E., "Il Futurismo e la politica dal nazionalismo modernista al fascismo (1909-1920)", in De Felice (ed.), *Futurismo*, pp. 161-76 and 105-60 respectively

⁶⁶ For the significance of Gabriele D'Annunzio in the development of fascist ideology in Italy see Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 64f; Ledeen, M. A., *The First Duce. D'Annunzio at Fiume* (Baltimore 1977); Mosse, G. L., "The poet and the exercise of political power: Gabriele D'Annunzio", in Mosse (ed.), *Masses and Man* (New York 1980), pp. 35-61

⁶⁷ Gentile, *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 218f; Missiroli, M., *Una Battaglia Perduta* (Milan 1924), pp. 301ff. For a criticism of the *Fasci* by the ANI see Pedrazzi, O., "I *Fasci* di combattimento. Un errore", *Idea Nazionale*, 25.3.1919

alien to Fascism's revolutionary *élan*. Even when the PNF emerged as the strongest nationalist force in 1921, or even after the March on Rome, the prospect of a merging of the two poles of the *Destra Nazionale* was viewed with considerable scepticism, if not hostility, among extreme groups of the PNF⁶⁸. Reservations about fusion were also expressed in the ANI camp, the spokesmen of which pointed to the ethical ambiguity and ideological poverty of Fascism⁶⁹. Yet, in the sphere of foreign policy, the lack of a clear vision in early Fascist expansionist rhetoric facilitated the assimilation of many nationalist themes in the programme of the PNF. The two parties shared a number of novelties and experiences which set them apart from the "old" Italian nationalism: the cult of war, the belief in a new hierarchy based on individual merit, the vision of a strong, expansionist Italy, the idea of an Italian "mission" and, most of all, the struggle of *intervento*⁷⁰.

The eventual fusion of the ANI into the PNF in 1923 constituted the first successful attempt at a wide political synthesis in the nationalist camp. It also provided tangible evidence of the process of ideological fusion in the nationalist Right which had been initiated with the *intervento* and had by 1922-23 entered its final, decisive stage⁷¹. By that time, Mussolini had already made a spectacular U-turn towards "normalisation" (rejecting its previous anti-monarchism, anti-capitalism, anti-clericalism and anti-étatisme⁷²) which enabled conservative figures like Federzoni and Rocco to be given strategic ministerial posts in the new Fascist cabinet. This transformation should not be attributed to what many historians have called the

⁶⁸ Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 221f, 385-6; De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 149ff

⁶⁹ See, for example, Ercole, F., "Contro un affrettata fusione", *Idea Nazionale*, 20.12.1921; D'Andrea, U., "Due nature, due compiti", *Idea Nazionale*, 25.11.1921, both reprinted in Perfetti, F., *Il nazionalismo italiano dalle origini alla fusione col fascismo* (Bologna 1977), pp. 267-82

⁷⁰ The ideological similarities of fascism with its nationalist predecessors are discussed in Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 56-60. See also Alatri, P., *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome 1963), pp. 5-31; Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 385ff; Mack Smith, D., *Le guerre di Duce* (Rome & Bari 1976), pp. 4-5. Generally, on the ideological influence of the ANI upon fascism see Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology", pp. 332-8

⁷¹ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 65-6

⁷² The idea of fascist "normalisation" is discussed in Andreski, S., "Fascists as Moderates", in Larsen, S. U., Hagtvet, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1980), pp. 52-5; Santarelli, C., *Storia del movimento e del regime fascista* (Rome 1967), pp. 288ff; Koch, H. W., "1933: The Legality of Hitler's Assumption of Power", in Koch (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 44-5; Eatwell, R., *Fascism: A History* (London 1995), p. 46

“triumph of the nationalist mentality over Fascism”⁷³. In the sphere of foreign policy, the PNF had long subscribed to the ideological myths of the ANI, but at the same time it imposed upon them an idiosyncratic emphasis on action - in contrast to the ANI’s intellectualism and obsession with programmes. With the fusion of 1923, Fascism completed its re-writing of post-unification national history. Both politically and ideologically, it emerged as the culmination of all those suppressed energies of the past with a unique dual task: to rectify the recent mistakes, and to fulfil the long-term visions of the *Risorgimento*, of Crispi and the *intervento*⁷⁴.

A similarly selective treatment of the past characterised the attempts of Nazi ideologues to historicise their movement. The *Dolchstoß* rhetoric relieved the Second Reich of the main responsibility for the humiliating postwar settlement. Of course, it was an undeniable truth that Wilhelminian Germany had failed to win the First World War. The reasons for this lay not in the qualities of the German *Volk* (which was superior, destined to dominate and of the highest racial stock, as Hitler repeatedly stressed⁷⁵), but in the political handling of foreign affairs by the Wilhelminian *Honorationenpolitiker*⁷⁶. Hitler was not prepared to demolish the reputation of pre-1914 Germany. That task would entail a rejection of the significance of unification, and of the special role of Bismarck in achieving it. Nazism needed these two elements in order to construct its own myth of national reawakening⁷⁷. The *Führer* was eager, however, to put the blame on the policies of

⁷³ For an analysis of this argument see Alatri, pp. 10ff; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, p. 68

⁷⁴ Rocco, A., “Genesi storica del fascismo”, in his *Scritti e discorsi politici*, vol. III (Milan 1938), pp. 1118f; “Il valore dell’atto”, *Idea Nazionale*, 28.2.1923, reprinted in Perfetti, *Il nazionalismo*, pp. 282-4

⁷⁵ Domarus, M., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945*, vol. I: *Triumph* (Würzburg 1962), p. 977 (speech to the German Press, Munich, 10 November 1938). See also pp. 194 (letter to Prälat, February 1933), 207 (speech in Berlin, February 1933), 609 (speech in Hamburg, March 1936), 743 (speech in Berlin, November 1937)

⁷⁶ Eley, G., *From Unification to Nazism. Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston, London & Sydney 1986), pp. 226f, and *Reshaping the German Right. Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven & London 1980), pp. 19ff, 356ff; Mommsen, H., “The Decline of Bürgertum in late 19th-early 20th century Germany”, in Mommsen, H. (ed.), *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (Cambridge 1991), pp. 11-27; Retallack, J. N., *Notables of the right. The Conservative Party and political mobilization in Germany* (Boston & London 1988)

⁷⁷ Andrews, H. D., “Hitler and Bismarck: A History”, *German Studies Review*, 14 (1991), pp. 511-32. For an assessment of Bismarck’s role by Hitler see Domarus, M., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen*, vol. II: *Untergang (1939-1945)* (Würzburg 1963), pp. 1032ff (Proclamation, 9 January 1939); Birken, L., *Hitler as Philosopher. Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport Connecticut & London 1995), pp. 50-1

Bethmann Hollweg which had isolated Germany from the other Great Powers (Britain, France, Russia) and pushed the Reich into a two-front war with no overall strategy and no concrete territorial objectives⁷⁸. The war in itself was not the sole responsibility of the Second Reich. The conspiracy of the “plutocratic” nations of the west (Britain, France) against Germany’s ascendancy had confined the Reich to a suffocating diplomatic encirclement which dictated a policy of self-defence. It was, therefore, a struggle for national survival and not crude imperialist aspirations which changed the “peace-loving” nature of the Second Reich⁷⁹. The Wilhelminian politicians, however, had “done everything by halves”⁸⁰ and thus failed to prepare the nation for the war, both militarily and psychologically. Their experiments with “alien” forms of internal organisation (liberalism, parliament, racial tolerance) had fatally undermined the strength of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and had led to a decline that became even more traumatic after 1918.

The criticism of the Second Reich for its share of responsibility for the events of 1914-18 was not peculiar to the NSDAP. Both the Wilhelminian *völkisch* nationalist organisations and the various radical nationalist groups and ideologues in the 1920s, pointed to Germany’s domestic and international weaknesses⁸¹. The need for radical change, “rejuvenation”, *Neugeburt*, had formed the focal point of the interwar nationalist rhetoric⁸². In the difficult years between 1920 and 1928, when the NSDAP was caught between putschism and diminishing electoral support, independent mentors of the “new” nationalism (Spengler, Jung, Jünger, Moeller van den Bruck, to name but a few⁸³) carried out a magnificent ideological preparation for the forthcoming “salvation”. Even Hitler himself initially perceived his role as a

⁷⁸ See the speech translated in Baynes, II, p. 1493 (speech for the *Parteitag* at Nuremberg, 12 September 1938); and another reference in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1340f (broadcast to the German *Volk*, 3 September 1939), where he reassured his audience that this time the invasion of Poland and the war would lead to a German victory.

⁷⁹ *Völkischer Beobachter* (henceforward, V. B.), 3-4-1939

⁸⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 215ff, and in general pp. 205-57

⁸¹ On the radical nationalist associations of the Wilhelminian period see Chickering, R., *We Men Who Feel Most German. A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston 1984), esp. pp. 278ff; Eley, *Reshaping*, pp. 41-98; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 85-94. For the Weimar period see the analysis of Struve, pp. 232-414; Mohler, pp. 35ff

⁸² See, for example, Rosenberg, A., *Krise und Neubau Europas* (Berlin 1934)

⁸³ See Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, Ch. 4; Sontheimer, K., *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich 1968); Smith, W. D., *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford 1986), pp. 196-230

“Drummer” (*Trommler*), a prophet for a future *Führer*⁸⁴. In this respect, the Nazi movement and its ideology became the platform of a synthesis of *völkisch* ideals of national unity, rebirth and greatness with the added element of historic urgency which pervaded the atmosphere of crisis in the 1920s. Where the NSDAP differed from the other forces of the nationalist opposition, however, was in its complete self-exemption from the stigma of the liberal system. The Nazi leadership emerged from the ruins of 1918 as a truly “new” spiritual élite, a negation of the forces of national destruction (liberalism, socialism, Jews), and of the “old” institutionalised nationalism⁸⁵. In this respect, the Nazi self-historicisation involved an unqualified rejection of post-Bismarckian choices. As in the case of Italy, the disaster of war was viewed as a “god-sent gift”, from which the apocalyptic vision of “new” Germany originated⁸⁶. Hitler’s theory of territorial expansion emerged from the experience of 1917-18, in an attempt to remedy those conditions which had led to encirclement, defeat and loss of territory⁸⁷. Furthermore, the degree of suffering that the negative elements of the old system inflicted upon the *Volk* strengthened and justified Nazism’s “anti” character as a precondition for a true national renaissance. Destruction and endurance in German history highlighted the “transcendental” necessity of the existence of the German *Volk*. This belief invested Nazism’s task of rebirth with a historic obligation to the nation itself, consisting in rescuing and completing the dream of unification but also defending the superiority of the national culture against the forces of “corruption” and “collapse”.

⁸⁴ On this issue see Tyrell, A, *Vom ‘Trommler’ zum ‘Führer’. Der Wandel von Hitlers Selbstverständnis zwischen 1919 und 1924 und die Entwicklung der NSDAP* (Munich 1975); Carr, W., *Hitler. A Study in Personality and Politics* (London 1978), pp. 14f. As Carr points out, Hitler repeatedly tried to rationalise his career afterwards, so as to present it as coherent and unwavering. In this sense, he criticises the idea that Hitler had formulated a definite version of his later ideology by 1922 (see for example, Stoakes, G., “The Evolution of Hitler’s Ideas on Foreign Policy, 1919-1925”, in Stachura, P. D. (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London 1978), pp. 22-47

⁸⁵ Baynes, I, p. 11-3 (speech in the conference of Genoa, 12 April 1922). For the distinction between “old” and “new” nationalism in Germany see Sontheimer, p. 26; Hamilton, pp. 120f

⁸⁶ Speech in front of party audience, 28 July 1922, quoted in Boepple, pp. 19-21. For the notion of catastrophe as a prerequisite for renaissance, common in the thinking of Juenger, Jung, van den Bruck, Spengler and other nationalist ideologues, see Mohler, pp. 82f; Struve, Chs. 8, 9, 11

⁸⁷ Rich, N., *Hitler’s War Aims*, vol. 1: *Ideology, the Nazi State and the Course of Expansion* (London 1973), xxx-xlii

The fascist myth of national unification: the “mission” of completing the creating the nation-state

The connection made by the fascist ideologues to the process and goals of national unification formed the basis of what has been termed the “palingenetic nature of fascism”, i.e. the revival of old national myths of grandeur in an effort to regenerate a society in deep crisis⁸⁸. Attacks on the concepts of “territorial saturation” and “pacifism” resonated with the belief that unification was incomplete, and this fatally undermined the process of domestic unity and national ascendancy. Proto-fascism rejected the complacency of the post-unification generations and advocated the completion of unification as the spiritual *sine qua non* of national regeneration. This was a message that, according to the radical nationalists, neither Italian liberal politicians nor the *Honorationenpolitiker* of the Wilhelminian-Weimar systems could comprehend. Their historic deviation from the true goals of unification remained a source of domestic and external weakness for the two countries and peoples, culminating in what was perceived as a disastrous postwar heritage. The triumph of fascism with the March on Rome of 1922 and the *Machtergreifung* of 1933 validated the perception of liberalism as a historic aberration in terminal decay. It also confirmed the historic role of the two regimes in returning the unification process to its ideological origins and in reinventing it, this time freed from the forces of corruption.

In this sense, fascism married its revolutionary activism with the idealism of national utopia and the necessity to expand in order to complete the mystic union of the whole nation within the national territory. This was not a re-negotiation of the past, but a conscious effort to reset the clock of national development and restart unification from point zero⁸⁹. It also mirrored a psychological reluctance to accept past failures (i.e. the thwarted visions of Crispi and Bismarck) as historic facts. In

⁸⁸ For an analysis of this term see Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, esp. pp. 32f, 74f, 217

⁸⁹ Stephenson, J., *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London 1981), Introduction

this respect, fascism may be seen as an alternative process of unification⁹⁰, in contrast to the political reality of unification as experienced after 1861 (in Italy) and 1871 (in Germany). Fascist ideology contrasted the ideological core of the unificatory vision (one state for the whole nation, nationalisation of the people, common struggle for greatness) to the decadent experience of the post-unification period. The myth of national rebirth expressed the aspirations of new politicised forces (the middle and lower classes), which had emerged after unification and now claimed a special role in the process of national ascendancy⁹¹. Representatives of these social groups interpreted the problems of the unified state not as the ideological bankruptcy of unification as an ideal, but as the outcome of political inertia, pragmatism and compromise by political leaders. The gap between the vision and the reality of unification, it was argued, was one of a mismatch between ideas and actual developments, thus underscoring the ideological sterility of liberalism. It was, therefore, fascism's historic role to reunite the initial idealism of the *Risorgimento* and the *Vereinigung* with a determination to achieve their goals. Fascists perceived the *raison d'être* of their movements as the ultimate culmination, not the negation, of the unificatory visions of the nineteenth century⁹². Liberalism, as the dominant force of the past century, attempted to give political expression to these visions, but had failed. Now, fascism, portrayed as the only meaningful political form of the twentieth century, would have its turn⁹³.

The fascist vision of national unification had two aspects of particular importance for fascism's territorial philosophy. The first pertained to the ideological

⁹⁰ This is the basic idea behind Salvatorelli's perception of fascism as "anti-Risorgimento". See Salvatorelli, L., *Nazionalfascismo* (Turin 1923); De Felice, R., *Interpretations of Fascism* (Cambridge Mass. & London 1977), p. 181; Hamilton, pp. 57-9

⁹¹ On the role of these social forces in the emergence of radical nationalist and authoritarian tendencies in the two countries see Blackbourn, D., Eley, G. (eds.), *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford 1984); Weisbrod, B., "The crisis of bourgeois society in Interwar Germany"; and Lyttelton, A., "The 'crisis of bourgeois society' and the origins of fascism", both in Bessel (ed.), pp. 23-39 and 12-22 respectively

⁹² This idea is expressed in De Marsanich, A., "Il punto fermo", *Critica Fascista*, 1-9-1924; Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, Chs. 5-7; OO, XIV, 71 ("L'ora nostra", *Popolo d'Italia*, 3 February 1920). Also in Hitler's speech in the aftermath of the *Anschluss*, reported in V. B., 18-3-1938 (reprinted in Baynes, II, pp. 1425-7)

⁹³ Scritti, III, 77 (published in *Gerarchia*, March 1923); OO, XXVI, 44 ("Fra due civiltà", speech in Rome, 22 August 1933); Mussolini, B., "Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism", in Oakeshott, M. (ed.), *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (New York 1949), pp. 164-79;

legacy of the patriarchal figures of the struggle for unity. In Italy, the prophecies of Mazzini, Oriani and Gioberti for the nation's superior historic mission were adopted by Fascist ideology as a proof of the limited relevance of the modern Italian state to the dream of the *Risorgimento*⁹⁴. The *Risorgimento*, according to Gentile, was not simply a static concept, an act that might or might not be accomplished. It was a permanent struggle for renaissance and grandeur, in which the conquest of Rome and Venice were landmarks but not termini⁹⁵. The liberal attempt to present unification as completed reflected a conservative philosophy of history and showed its ideological irrelevance to the "revolutionary" and idealistic principles that inspired the *Risorgimento*⁹⁶. The failure to carry out the promises of 1848-60 had its roots in the marginalisation of Mazzini and Garibaldi by a liberal "oligarchy" which held a pragmatic and limited vision of the "new" Italy. Mussolini was always at pains to criticise the notion that the *Risorgimento* had been a liberal accomplishment. For him, the Garibaldian revolutionary and universalist vision, on the one hand, and the Mazzinian idealism (represented as the heritage of Dante), on the other, had been the two foundations of the modern Italian state⁹⁷. The liberals entered the game later and they usurped the ideological and political credit for unification, with the disastrous consequences of Giolittism and postwar humiliation. In his co-operation with Gentile, Mussolini saw the unity of ideals and actions which reflected the complementary roles of Mazzini and Garibaldi, against liberal introversion and lack of vision⁹⁸.

Scritti, II, 339ff ("Discorso di Napoli", 24 October 1922), reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), *Scritti di Mussolini*, pp. 219-23

⁹⁴ See, for example, Gentile, G., *Profeti del Risorgimento*; Simonini, A., *Il linguaggio di Mussolini* (Milan 1978), pp. 96-99; "Il monito di Oriani", *Popolo d'Italia*, 14.3.1915, reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), *Scritti di Mussolini*, pp. 157-60; and OO, XX, 244-5 ("Oriani", speech in Cardello, 27 April 1924)

⁹⁵ Gentile, G., *Guerra e Fede* (Rome 1927, 2nd edition), pp. 55ff

⁹⁶ Salomone, A. W., "The Risorgimento and the Political Myth of the 'Revolution that Failed'", *American Historical Review*, 68 (1964), pp. 38-53

⁹⁷ Scritti, IV, 63-84 ("Cinque anni dopo San Sepolcro", commemorative speech, 24 March 1923); 327-8 (speech in Dalmine, 27 October 1924); 323-5 (speech in Bergamo, 27 October 1924)

⁹⁸ OO, XIII, 296. On a general discussion of the connection between fascism and *Risorgimento* see Mack Smith, D., "The Prehistory of Fascism", reprinted in Salomone, A. W. (ed.), *Italy from Risorgimento to Fascism. An Inquiry into the Origins of the Totalitarian State* (Newton Abbot 1971), pp. 103-23

Hitler, too, perceived his task as a continuation of Bismarck's artificially interrupted and distorted vision of national grandeur. This goal was significantly more difficult than the defence of Mazzini and Garibaldi by the *Duce*, since the architect of the German nation-state shared responsibility in the fate of post-unification Germany in the 1870s and 1880s⁹⁹. Bismarck had been very reluctant either to pursue a policy of colonial expansion or to promote the territorial goal of *Grossdeutschland* (i.e. the completion of unification with the inclusion of Austria into the Reich¹⁰⁰). His dismissal in 1890, however, marked the end of an era and initiated the downward slide of the Second Reich. Hitler did not fail to criticise the shortcomings of Bismarckian Germany, but he was always respectful of the role and the vision of Bismarck himself¹⁰¹. He was the "prophet", the "precursor of Great-Germany", the man who realised the destiny of the German *Volk* and initiated the difficult process of its renaissance¹⁰². The elements of "moral decay", inherent in his Reich, finally managed to overpower him, leaving the task of forming a complete state and a mature nation unfinished¹⁰³. Yet, here lay the historic significance of the Nazi movement, which was to draw the Bismarckian effort to its logical conclusion. The Nazi regime was destined to fulfil the last stage of unification, namely to create one people and one Reich, as well as to unite the German state with its historic birthplace of central Europe which remained "unredeemed"¹⁰⁴. The negative experience of the past taught Hitler to avoid compromises and not to waste any valuable time. German unification was historically incomplete and this would eventually drag Germany into chaos, unless it was complemented immediately. Any hesitation would exacerbate the problems and lead to a repetition of the post-Bismarckian disaster¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁹ See Hitler's speech of 20 February 1938 to the *Reichstag*, quoted from the authorised English translation in Baynes, II, pp. 1376ff

¹⁰⁰ Birken, p. 50-1

¹⁰¹ Andrews, pp. 511f

¹⁰² Speech reported in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (henceforward F. Z.), 15-2-1939

¹⁰³ Speech translated and quoted in Baynes, II, p. 1012f (speech to the *Reichstag*, 21 March 1933). See also Birken, pp. 50-1

¹⁰⁴ V. B., 21-2-1938, 27-3-1938; and speech reported in F. Z., 8-4-1938. See also Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 351-98, 599ff; *Zweites Buch*, pp. 115-6

¹⁰⁵ Baynes, II, p. 1377 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 20 February 1938)

The fascist myth of unification recast the traditional radical nationalist claim of uniting all ethnically kin populations and their territories with the fatherland. Having successfully amalgamated previous nationalist themes into their ideological system, the two fascist movements emerged in the 1920s as the torch-bearers of the struggle for the rebirth of their nations and for the promotion of the nationalist utopia of completing the process of unification. This notion provided the first tangible argument in defence of territorial expansion beyond the existing boundaries of the two countries. However, in contrast to conventional irredentist arguments, fascist ideology accentuated the radical nationalist claim for an open-ended process of expansion far beyond what could be justified in purely ethnic terms. The completion of unification had immense territorial and, above all, spiritual value but was regarded as the necessary *sine qua non* for greatness, the beginning - rather than the terminus - of national "palingenesis". What transformed territorial expansion from a political option of limited scope into a historic necessity for fascist ideology was the emphasis on two further abstract principles. The first was the conception of *history as a constant struggle* in social Darwinist terms for the survival and triumph of the fittest. The second pertained to the self-perception of everything fascist (leadership, nation, culture) as an *elite force*, entrusted with a mission to legitimise the spreading of its values. To these two pivotal elements we shall turn now.

III. Beyond national unification: justifying the right to expand

Fascist expansionism, "constant struggle" and the ideology of "violence"

If fascism's analysis of the past provided ideological support for the claim of Italy and Germany for international leadership, post-1918 political realities seemed to impede the realisation of this destiny. Both fascist leaders capitalised on this gap between the historic right of their nations to dominate and the artificial thwarting of

this destiny by internal and external foes in the recent past¹⁰⁶. They based their appeal on the promise to rectify this historic aberration by exploiting the dynamism which the Italian and German nations *de facto* possessed, based on their alleged spiritual superiority and “widest range of capacities”¹⁰⁷. Expansion, as Hitler repeatedly emphasised, was the historic right of the “talented” people to possess space equivalent to the quality of their activities, but the reality was diametrically different, with less talented people possessing “a greater and often unexplored extent of living space”¹⁰⁸. Neither of the two leaders, however, made any secret of the difficulties that this promise entailed. The rise of the two “young” nations to prominence would continue to be subverted by the selfishness and greed of the “old”, “plutocratic” powers¹⁰⁹. History in itself, according to fascist ideology, was the outcome of a permanent struggle for survival and domination. In the long term, only the most competent would excel. Struggle, even in the form of violent confrontation, was both inevitable and desirable for the fulfilment of the fascist prophecies¹¹⁰.

This was the point where expansion ceased to be simply *one* option for foreign policy-making and became a necessity for the existence and the legitimate aspirations of the two nations. The belief that history was decided by constant struggle, and the conviction that fascist all-round excellence was destined to prevail, offered a new significance to the spreading of the fascist idea through force. In this sense, expansionism was not simply a political form of control and subordination of populations or a policy of ruthless exploitation (as in the case of British and French imperialism). It was rather the natural extension of a higher moral, cultural and biological order. The ethical-religious connotations are obvious. Fascism was

¹⁰⁶ Scritti, II, 52, 55; and, for the need to modify the Treaty, II, 114. For more details see, in this study, Ch. 4, Section II

¹⁰⁷ Baynes, I, p. 989ff (interview with Otto Strasser, 21 May 1930); and II, 1041-2 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 17 May 1933), 1260-3 (interview to *Paris Soir*, 27 January 1936); Scritti, II, 114 (“Ciò che rimane e ciò che verrà”, 13 November 1920)

¹⁰⁸ Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 748ff (Hossbach Conference, 5 November 1937); II, p. 1052 (speech to party members, 30 January 1939); Baynes, II, p. 1262 (interview to *Paris Soir*, 27 January 1936)

¹⁰⁹ Scritti, I, 321 (“La vittoria fatale”, speech in Bologna, 24 May 1918); Baynes, II, p. 1547 (speech in Weimar, 6 November 1938)

¹¹⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 123; Weinberg (ed.), *Zweites Buch*, pp. 34, 46ff; Boepple, pp. 40-1; OO, XVII, 282; XVIII, 235ff; XXI, 160ff. For an analysis of these ideas see Rich, I, pp. 8-10

destined to expand as a force of salvation and rebirth¹¹¹. The media for this new order were the two nations with the strongest universal cultural tradition. Italy and Germany, both separately and *en bloc* after 1936¹¹², were so powerful internally that they were designed to turn this dynamism outwards, in an expansion of values that was a natural and moral inevitability.

The cult of violence in fascist ideology had two separate aspects¹¹³. The *spiritual* aspect of violence was perceived as a force of national renovation, as an imperative step in the re-education of the individual in order to “remake his content” and transform him into a genuine *uomo fascista*¹¹⁴. Fascism, Mussolini argued, was the negation of liberalism, because the former “attacks” and progresses while the latter only “defended” and sank into inertia¹¹⁵. Fascism’s task was to mobilise the Italian people both for the works of peace and the ineluctable labours of war¹¹⁶. One of his favourite themes was the “morality” of violence and its spiritual importance as expression of human will. In a speech he gave at Udine just a month before the March on Rome, he stressed that violence was a legitimate instrument of the State, crucial for the spiritual preparation of the Italian people for their future glory¹¹⁷. In the opening speech to the Fascist Congress of 1925 he went even further, claiming that violence was more moral than any form of compromise or negotiation¹¹⁸. Force was lawful and preferable to inertia, so long as it was pervaded by a worthy objective and was not blind¹¹⁹. In December 1924, speaking about his regime’s foreign policy

¹¹¹ Hartmut, L., “The Germans as a Chosen People: Old Testament Themes in German Nationalism”, *German Studies Review*, 14.2 (1991), pp. 261-73; Steding, C., *Das Reich und die Krankheit Europas* (Hamburg 1938). See also OO, XXIX, 403-5

¹¹² See Hitler’s references in the joint mission of the two fascist nations in Baynes, II, pp. 1520-1 (speech in Sportpalast Berlin, 26 September 1938)

¹¹³ See the insightful analysis in Neocleous, pp. 1-18; and also Galli, G., *I partiti politici* (Turin 1974), pp. 231ff

¹¹⁴ Mussolini, B., “Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism” (1932), pp. 164-79, also in OO, XXXIV, 124ff

¹¹⁵ Scritti, III, 60 (“La nuova politica estera”, speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 16 February 1923)

¹¹⁶ Scritti, I, 320-1 (“Vittoria fatale”, 19 May 1918)

¹¹⁷ OO, XVIII, 413f/Scritti, II, 307-22 (speech in Udine, 20 September 1922); Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 188-9. On the spiritual force of violence see also Corradini, “The Principles of Nationalism”, pp. 145-7

¹¹⁸ Scritti, V, 109-18 (speech to the Fascist Congress at Rome, 22 June 1925). Cf. V, 179-81 (“Elementi di Storia”, *Gerarchia*, October 1925)

¹¹⁹ Scritti, V, 173-81 (“Elementi di Storia”, October 1925); Gentile, E., *Storia del Partito Fascista, 1919-1922. Movimento e militia* (Rome & Bari 1989), pp. 470ff; Zapponi, N., “Fascism in Italian

in front of the Italian Deputies, he once again underscored the morality of violence and asked the Italian people to be prepared for an “armed peace”¹²⁰. Only through the spiritual strength of violence and will could the Italian people be transformed into a real nation of warriors, building upon the experience of the First World War¹²¹.

In Germany, on the other hand, war and violence were significantly more embedded virtues in the militarist framework of society¹²². Exponents of radical nationalist ideology saw in war the means to “transcend” decadent bourgeois morality and to continue the process of transformation that had been initiated with the First World War¹²³. The overwhelming majority of the respondents to the Abel interviews accepted the necessity of using violence, and almost half of them exercised it wholeheartedly as a moral means to promote the Nazi new domestic order¹²⁴. Nazism endorsed and systematised the notion of a *Volk* in a state of constant mobilisation, modelled along the example of the armed forces¹²⁵. The “military” structure of the Nazi organisations, the spirit of “comradeship” they inspired to their recruits and the opportunities they offered for activism were regarded by the Abel Nazis as the most important factors in their decision to join the NSDAP¹²⁶. Violence and war became the ultimate expressions of the will to dominate, as well as the devices that offered concrete, effective form to fascist political activism. All these amounted to a perception of violence and war as both a means and an end in itself - a

Historiography, 1986-93: a Fading National Identity”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), pp. 558-9

¹²⁰ Scritti, IV, 381-90 (speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 15 November 1924). Cf. the use of the same term in justification of the Italian non-belligerence in November 1939 in OO, XXIX, 327 (15 November 1939)

¹²¹ Scritti, V, 179 (“Elementi di Storia”, October 1925). See also the analysis in Zapponi, pp. 559ff

¹²² Knox, M., “Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships” in Bessel (ed.), pp. 115-23; Struve, pp. 424-5

¹²³ Theweleit, K., *Male Fantasies*, vol. II: *Male Bodies: psychoanalyzing the white terror* (Cambridge 1989), pp. xii-xviii, 345-407. On the origins of the ideology of violence see Sorel, G., *Réflexions sur la violence* (Paris 1912)

¹²⁴ Merkl, pp. 540ff

¹²⁵ Struve, pp. 385ff. In Ernst Juenger’s work similar references are numerous. See for example, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg 1932, 2nd ed.), pp. 90, 161f; and “Die Totale Mobilmachung”, in Juenger (ed.), *Krieg und Krieger* (Berlin 1930), p. 14; Herf, Ch. 4

¹²⁶ Merkl, pp. 616-7

means for realising national destiny, and a goal in its ethical and educational value for the people¹²⁷.

The external aspect of violence, i.e. its use *against* others and its destructive potential, was regarded by fascist ideology as less fortunate, but no less inevitable or legitimate. Mussolini saw confrontation as a historic necessity, since life itself was punctuated by antitheses and clashes. It was not a pleasant “sport” or an entertainment to exercise violence, he noted in 1924, but in the end fundamental conflicts could be resolved only through force and war¹²⁸. In this respect, the use of violence by an élite was moral and legitimate, not only in a natural sense (the strongest had to prevail), but also politically (in order to bring the necessary readjustments to the “new order”)¹²⁹. This was an argument consistent with the squads’ emphasis on violent action and their “dogmatic, violent negation of the present”, as Mussolini described it in the Doctrine of Fascism. Fascism, he continued, did not believe in pacifism and perpetual peace, as these derived from the renunciation of struggle and from cowardice in the face of sacrifice¹³⁰. War was regarded as the “most ferocious necessity”, but it also possessed qualities which determined the “whole progress of humanity”¹³¹. The nation, he added in 1934, must be militarised and prepare for war by subjecting all other considerations and needs to military priorities¹³². Similarly, Hitler repeatedly stressed his aversion to violence as such, but claimed that its use had been sanctioned by higher historic priorities. The right of the German *Volk* to transform its inner superiority into international supremacy was questioned by a plethora of *Feinde*. If Germany wished to become again a great power (and, as an élite, she had the obligation to do so), she had to fight against the desire of her enemies to annihilate her¹³³. The Nazi “new world” would come to life only through struggle and destruction, the latter directed against the

¹²⁷ OO, XXI, 193f/Scritti, IV, 391-402 (“La politica interna al Senato”, 5 December 1924)

¹²⁸ Scritti, II, 53/OO, XVI, 445 (“Navigare necesse”, 1 January 1920); IV, 334f (speech in Cremona, 29 October 1924)

¹²⁹ OO, XXI, 193 (“Politica interna”, 5 December 1924)

¹³⁰ Mussolini, B., “Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”, in Oakeshott, M. (ed.), *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (New York 1949), pp. 167f

¹³¹ OO, XXVI, 259ff (speech at Turin, 4 May 1934). Cf. Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”, pp. 168f. See also Simonini, pp. 138-40

¹³² OO, XXVI, 308f (“Dopo le grande manovre” speech, 24 August 1934)

¹³³ Rich, pp. 3-10

forces of national and universal decay. On this point, National Socialism went significantly further than Italian Fascism. Hitler did not simply perceive the birth of the “new” as originating from the defeat of the “old”. Nazi ideology glorified total destruction as a precondition for total victory, but also as a goal in itself which would ineluctably lead to renovation¹³⁴.

Fascism and *elitism*: élite “leaders”, élite “nations”, élite “civilisations”, and fascism’s “mission” of expansion

It has been one of the most perplexing ideological paradoxes of fascism that it strove to stress its egalitarian, meritocratic and classless elements¹³⁵ while at the same time not concealing its elitist character. Unfortunately, even the few systematic accounts of *fascist elitism* focus on National Socialist movement¹³⁶. Moreover, these accounts have been dominated by the domestic aspects of fascism as “political” élite, and have widely disregarded the ramifications of elitism for both the national and international practices of the fascist regimes. It is crucial to understand that these elitist theories were at the root of serious tension between “élites” and “non-élites” which inevitably resulted in the dominance of the former over the latter. In this sense, the “triumph” of fascism reflected the dynamism of the fascist élites, as well as their self-assigned “mission” to dominate and lead those groups that had been excluded from the fascist definition of élite.

Fascist elitism owed its ideological substance to the previous elitist theories of social transformation. People like Michels and especially Pareto had spoken of a pattern of constant circulation of elites in society and viewed the triumph of one elite

¹³⁴ Baynes, II, p. 1552 (speech in Munich for the anniversary of the 1923 Putsch, 8 November 1938). See also, for an analysis, Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 106, 110-2

¹³⁵ Struve, pp. 418ff; Linz, “Some Notes”, pp. 36f; Schoenbaum, D., *Hitler’s Social Revolution. Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (New York & London 1980), Ch. 8. On the anti-class character of fascism see (for Italy) Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 363f; Rocco, A., “La dottrina politica del fascismo”, in Rocco, *Scritti e discorsi politici*, vol. III (Milan 1938), pp. 1099ff; Rossoni, E., “Sindicalismo fascista”, *La Stirpe*, 6 (1928), pp. 705-7, reprinted in Casucci (ed.), *Antologia*, pp. 113-7; Ferrari, F. L., *Le régime fasciste italien* (Paris 1928), pp. 241ff; and (for Germany), Baynes, I, pp. 15-16 (speech in Genoa Conference, 12 April 1922), 430-1 (speech to the *Reichstag*, December 1933); Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 351-98; Birken, pp. 65-6

¹³⁶ On the paucity of literature regarding the elitist aspects of fascist ideology see Struve, p. 415, n. 1

group as evidence of its superior qualities. In this sense, Pareto argued, fascism represented a victory of a historic set of ideas and mentalities which were destined to prevail and become generic¹³⁷. At the same time, elitism evolved out of fascism's interpretation of history in essentially social Darwinist terms. The two fascist movements introduced themselves as the reincarnation of the highest elements of the *Risorgimento* and the *Vereinigung*, the bearers of the task to fulfil the prophecies of national reawakening and excellence. On a more general level, the fascist movements had allegedly emerged as a political, ideological and ethical élite through their successful struggle against the "old" forces of national and universal decay¹³⁸. Perseverance in difficult times led to their eventual victory and thus justified their self-historicisation as the new dynamic force, destined to guide the nation towards a future utopia.

There are two crucial implications from fascist elitist ideology. The first demonstrates that fascist elitism was not limited to the notion of an élite leadership¹³⁹, but embraced two further levels: an élite of *nations*, and an élite of *races* or *forms of civilisation*. The second implication concerned the interrelation of the elitist fascist theories with the propensity for aggressive expansion. The social Darwinist production of the élites (as leaders, nations and races or cultures) gave them a sense of historic significance and a determination to continue their struggle for the attainment of their allegedly superior historic objectives. Fascists were ideologically conditioned to reject all forms of political introversion or inertia, and to seek to dominate all (domestic and international) who resisted their historic message.

¹³⁷ See Pareto, V., *I aiutemi socialisti* (Turin 1954); Finer, S. E., *Vilfredo Pareto: Sociological Writings* (London 1966), pp. 51-71. A relevant excerpt is translated in Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 71-90. For an assessment of Pareto's influence on Mussolini's thought see Simonini, pp. 99-104; Borkenau, F., *Pareto* (London 1936), pp. 18ff, 185ff; Wilford, "Fascism", pp. 194-6 and Mosca, G., *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (Turin 1925). For an analysis of the Italian elitist theories see Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 36-46

¹³⁸ Baynes, II, p. 1377 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 20 February 1938); Hamilton, pp. 53-4

¹³⁹ Strasser, O., *Aufbau des Sozialismus* (Prague 1936), pp. 103-4, translated and cited in Griffin, *Fascism*, pp. 114-5; OO, VI, 80-1 ("Valore del socialismo", 8 February 1914). See also the relevant analysis in O'Sullivan, pp. 149-60; Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, p. 401f; Glaser, H., *The Cultural Roots of National Socialism* (London 1978), pp. 130-5. For the role of leadership in the fascist systems see also below, Chs. 4, 7

Expansion, therefore, was the outward manifestation of fascism's transcendental power, of the fascist will to power and of the claim to ethical supremacy¹⁴⁰.

Domestic conquest was the primary task of the fascist élite as the "leadership" of the nation. The two fascist movements shared a biological interpretation of hierarchy as the outcome of a permanent struggle between old and new forces. Elites performed their historic functions, but they were destined to decay or defeat by stronger and "younger" groups in a circulation of élites¹⁴¹. The production of the fascist élites in Italy and Germany was vastly different from the old pattern of a *de iure* class-based aristocracy which was unassailable in its leadership position. Fascism was meritocratic in the sense that its leadership was open to the whole nation, regardless of old criteria of wealth or origin¹⁴². It was, however, highly elitist in its self-perception as a *spiritual* aristocracy which had been shaped during its struggle for power and its eventual victory¹⁴³. The events of 1922 and 1933 not only legitimised the transcendental role of the historic fascist leadership, but also proved the superiority of its vision and morality. After the acquisition of power, these two lessons should be taught to the rest of the nation through a process of spiritual education which entailed the eradication of all opposition or deviation. Fascism *had* to be totalitarian, as a political choice and as an ideological necessity. Since deviation from the fascist paradigm meant negation of its special value and destiny, opposition or compromise were inconceivable¹⁴⁴.

The establishment of the fascist leadership as the spiritual aristocracy of the nation inevitably created a gap between the élite and non-élite elements within the

¹⁴⁰ Birken, pp. 81-7

¹⁴¹ Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, 197ff; Struve, pp. 344-52, 384ff

¹⁴² See, for example, Hitler's references on the non-class, "open" character of Nazism, in Baynes, I., 620-1 (speech in Berlin, 1 May 1937); and Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 392ff. Also, Jung, E. J., *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen. Ihr Zerfall und ihre Ablösung durch ein neues Reich* (Berlin 1927), pp. 329ff. See also Schoenbaum, Chs. 8-9

¹⁴³ Struve, pp. 349-52; von Kotze, H., Krausnick, H. (eds.), *"Es spricht Hitler". Sieben exemplarische Hitler-Reden* (Gütersloh 1966), p. 141 (speech in Berlin, 28 May 1925)

¹⁴⁴ For this notion see Spirito, U., "Il concetto di libertà e i diritti dell'opposizione", *Critica Fascista*, 15-6-1924; and Struve, pp. 437-8; Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 231-9. For a general analysis of the connection between totalitarianism and fascism see Bracher, K. D., *Totalitarismus und Faschismus. Eine wissenschaftliche und politische Begriffskontroverse* (Munich & Vienna 1980). It is important to note that we use the term here not in its original sense (proposed by Arendt), but in the sense of the "total" character of control that fascism aimed to exercise in domestic life. On this matter see Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 31ff; and Carocci, G., *Storia d'Italia dall'unità ad oggi* (Milan 1975), pp. 265-71

national community. Notwithstanding the “open”, meritocratic character of the two movements, the fascist regimes gradually imposed a new hierarchical structure. The privilege of moral and political authority was the monopoly of the enlightened fascist “minority” and this was potentially the source of an inferiority complex for the majority excluded from the élite group. Mussolini described the Fascist leadership as “few but the greatest force of the nation”, while Hitler justified the principle of authoritative leadership as legitimate if based on genuine spiritual values¹⁴⁵. To allay these sentiments of discrimination, fascist ideology introduced the idea that the whole “fascist” nation was *de facto* an élite among the community of nations. This transfer of elitist sentiment to the level of the nation performed two important functions. First, it established an egalitarian concept of nation, based on a community of people who share the same qualities and pursued common objectives for the benefit of the collectivity¹⁴⁶. Second, it translated the notion of historic hierarchy to the international system by asserting the superiority of the new élite of “young nations”, i.e. the Italian and German nations¹⁴⁷. The two nations had historically manifested their ability to produce the highest forms of universal civilisation¹⁴⁸. The alleged Roman and Christian origins of the modern Italian state, and the heritage of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation¹⁴⁹ attested to the long-standing spiritual superiority of the two peoples. This belief was strengthened by the grievances of the post-unification period. In spite of international “conspiracies” and the tyranny of the decadent “old” nations¹⁵⁰, Italy and Germany displayed an admirable determination to survive and a will to excel, which attested to their

¹⁴⁵ OO, XI, 87/Scritti, II, 253 (speech to the Chamber, 17 February 1922); Baynes, I, p. 623 (speech in the Nuremberg Party Rally, 12 September 1938); Jung, pp. 344; Domarus, *Hitler*, I, p. 716 (Proclamation, 7 September 1937). See also Struve, pp. 408-9, 429ff, for a discussion of the relation between leader and people.

¹⁴⁶ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, p. 37; Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 258-99

¹⁴⁷ V.B., 14-9-1938; and Mussolini's speech on 28-9-1937, first published in *Popolo d'Italia*, 29-9-1937, translated and cited in Delzell, C. F. (ed.), *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919-1945* (New York, Evanston & London 1970), pp. 202-5

¹⁴⁸ Scritti, II, 214 (speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 26 November 1921); Papini, G., *Italia mia* (Florence 1941), passim; and Hitler's speech to students in Berlin, published in F.Z., 8-2-1934, quoted in Speer, A., *Inside the Third Reich* (London 1970), pp. 14-6

¹⁴⁹ For the imperial traditions of the two countries see [Italy] Mack Smith, *Guerre di Duce*, pp. 15f; OO, XIX, 266; and [Germany] Baynes, II, pp. 1002-3 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 20 February 1938); Domarus, *Hitler*, I, 765-6 (speech in Berlin, 27 November 1937); Jung, pp. 75ff

¹⁵⁰ See Mussolini's criticism of Britain and France in OO, XIII, 147ff

transcendental power as precursors of a new historic era. The victory of Fascism terminated the cycle of national decay and brought the two nations back onto their destiny. L. Federzoni described the establishment of Fascism in Italy as the culmination of a historic process which had started with the *Risorgimento* and consolidated with the experience of the First World War¹⁵¹. In a similar way, Hitler described the role of the Nazi regime as the decisive start in a long process of “liberating Germany” from the past¹⁵². The nations of Italy and Germany, according to the words of Hitler, “stand young not on new territory, but on historic soil”¹⁵³. Their classification as élite nations stemmed not simply from the power of destiny, but from the ability of fascism to provide allegedly tangible evidence of this historic superiority. Both leaders placed particular emphasis on the demographic vitality of the population. Mussolini’s persistent efforts to promote a combination of food- and birth-increase policies in the second half of the 1920s aimed to ensure a demographic boom, which was regarded a necessary evidence of the nation’s renewed vitality under Fascism. Women were seen as the bearers of a new generation of warriors and should, therefore, be confined to their domestic functions as wives and mothers in order to contribute best to this national goal¹⁵⁴. Italy, he argued in 1923, should avoid the fate of France, whose demographic decadence was regarded as evidence of political and spiritual decline¹⁵⁵. The same example was used by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* as an example of what Germany should avoid in order to reclaim her international position and historic significance. In 1937 he celebrated what he called

¹⁵¹ Federzoni, L., “Nuove ipocrisie legalitaria”, in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 40-1 [speech delivered in the Chamber, June 1922]

¹⁵² Baynes, I, pp. 617-8 (speech in Munich, 24 February 1935)

¹⁵³ Baynes, II, p. 1498 (speech in *Parteitag*, Nuremberg 12 September 1938)

¹⁵⁴ De Grazia, V., *The Culture of Consent. Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge 1981), pp. 220ff; Simonini, pp. 118-20

¹⁵⁵ On the demographic propaganda of the Fascist regime see Mussolini, B., “Il numero come forza”, *Gerarchia*, 9 September 1928, reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), *Scritti di Mussolini*, pp. 248-51; “Ai combattenti della Battaglia del grano”, in Scritti, V, 143-4 [speech delivered at Rome, 11 October 1925]. For the failure of these policies to result in a demographic boom see Caldwell, L., “Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in Fascist Policy”, in Forgacs, D. (ed.), *Rethinking Italian Fascism. Capitalism, Populism and Culture* (London 1986), pp. 110-41; Willson, P. R., “Women in Fascist Italy”, in Bessel (ed.), pp. 84ff. For the comments regarding France see OO, XVIII, 396f (June 1923)

“fifteen years ... of strong life” after a period of painful decay, evident in the strength, progress and numerical expansion of the German *Volk*¹⁵⁶.

Civilisations and races as “élites”: racialism, anti-Semitism and fascist ideology

The third level of the fascist élite ideology again rested upon the perception of the fascist nation as a superior force. This time, however, the implications of this transcendental privilege were extended much further, presenting fascism as an élite force of civilisation in a historic, universal sense. It is paradoxical that fascism, initially portrayed by its own ideologues as a *national* force vehemently hostile to any notion of internationalism, ended up with a teleological vision which reflected notions of universal domination and historic endism¹⁵⁷. The universal tendencies of fascism had their origins in the elitist theory of the fascist nation, but were politically indispensable in the context of the historic antithesis between socialism and fascism¹⁵⁸. Bolshevism represented a lethal menace both to individual nations and to the whole existence of “European” civilisation. Fascism represented, therefore, a dual defence. First, it should safeguard the élite character of the nation against the international forces of corruption. Second, it had to defend the European culture,

¹⁵⁶ Domarus, I, pp. 759-60 (speech in Augsburg, 21 November 1937); Baynes, II, pp. 1220 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 21 May 1935). Again, however, the demographic boom remained a myth. See Stephenson, J., “Reichsbund der Kinderreichen: The League of Large Families in the Population Policy of Nazi Germany”, *European Studies Review*, 9 (1979), pp. 351-75; Knodel, J. E., *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871-1939* (Princeton 1974)

¹⁵⁷ See a series of aggressive comments made by Hitler against the notion of internationalism in Baynes, I, pp. 256, 259 (speech in Berlin, 2 March 1933); II, 1047 (“*Friedensrede*” speech to the *Reichstag*, 17 May 1933). Note, however, the ambiguities of the fascist discourse in this respect, discussed in Megaro, G., *Mussolini in the Making* (London 1938), pp. 318ff; Sacconi, S., “A proposito di un libro di Ernst Nolte. Il volto pecoliare del fascismo”, reprinted in Casucci (ed.), *Antologia*, pp. 680-3

¹⁵⁸ The importance of bolshevism in the production of the fascist *Weltanschauung* has been widely accepted. See Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 437-61; Göring, H., *Aufbau einer Nation* (Berlin 1934), passim; and Schiavi, A., *Esilio e morte di Filippo Turati* (Rome 1956), pp. 122ff. See also various analyses of this issue in Nolte, E., *Three Faces of Fascism. Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (London 1965), pp. 360ff, 384ff, 404ff; Neocleous, M., *Fascism* (London 1997), pp. 38-58; Del Noce, A., “Appunti per una definizione storica del fascismo”, in Pavetto, R. (ed.), *Il problema storico del fascismo* (Florence 1970), pp. 133ff; Glaser, pp. 121-5; Linz, “Some Notes”, p. 26. However, compare Bracher’s assertion that fascism’s emphasis on anti-communism was “merely propagandistic” in his *The Age of Ideologies. A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London 1982), pp. 98-9

which both Italian and German fascist ideologies perceived as the historic achievement of their respective nations¹⁵⁹.

This universal “mission” of fascism portrayed the fascist nations as the élite, or the most superior form, of civilisation. Before the 1936-8 period, each of the two regimes had attempted to monopolise this title for itself and its respective nation. The dual heritage of Rome and Catholicism formed the basis of Fascism’s claim to universality and cultural superiority. Nazi ideology, on the other hand, presented the Teutonic past and the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire as evidence of Germany’s destiny to dominate and defend Europe¹⁶⁰. After the rapprochement between Italy and Germany, the two fascist leaderships presented the historic task of the struggle against bolshevism as a joint undertaking¹⁶¹. Fascism was destined to prevail, both by dominating this civilisation and by defeating the other “corrupted” or “barbaric” forms of culture. Its success and rejuvenating dynamism had their foundations in the superior qualities of the two nations which formed the fascist bloc. They had now re-emerged after a cycle of decay, reborn under fascism, to assume their historic responsibilities. In inaugurating a new stage in civilisation, fascism had not only the moral right, but also the obligation to expand, i.e. to become universal and thus to spread its superior political, ideological, social and ethical message to humanity.

However, in the execution of their universal project, the two regimes exhibited considerable differences which merit attention. A fundamental difference between the two fascist ideologies was the way in which the concept of *nation* was defined. Italian Fascism, as well as its nationalist precursors, stood for a voluntarist idea of nation-formation¹⁶². The *nazione* comprised all those individuals who shared an Italian cultural ideal, those who placed their allegiance to the Italian state and

¹⁵⁹ Both Hitler and Mussolini made numerous references to the anti-Bolshevik character of their regimes and their Axis alliance. See, for example, Baynes, II, pp. 1234-5 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 21 May 1935), 1252ff (speech in the *Parteitag*, Nuremberg, 11 September 1935), 1331 (speech in the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival, 4 October 1936); Scritti, II, 7-14 (“Posizioni e obiettivi” and “Discorso da Ascoltare”, in *Popolo d’Italia*, March 1919 and May 1919 respectively); Delzell, pp. 202-5.

¹⁶⁰ These aspects of fascist ideology are analysed later in this chapter, Section IV

¹⁶¹ Baynes, II, pp. 1115 (speech in Berlin, 24 October 1933), 1352 (speech to representatives of the Italian *Balilla*, 16 June 1937); OO, XXVIII, 248-53 (“Discorso di Torino”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 15.5.1939); see for the report and repercussions of the speech in DDI, 8th, V, 29/83

¹⁶² “Irredentismo”, in Levi, Levrà, Tranfaglia (eds.), *Storia d’Italia*, (Florence 1978), vol. II, pp. 573-83

tradition above any other loyalty, religious or ethnic¹⁶³. In this sense, the nation was not a biological or historic reality, but the result of a continuing process of cultural education and integration¹⁶⁴. Undoubtedly, there was an extremist minority in the Italian Fascist movement which advocated a semi-biological, unalterable inherent national identity. Their ideas, however, did not gain wide currency, even in such fertile ground as the anti-Semitic or anti-Slav groups within the Fascist party¹⁶⁵. Even in the early years of the movement, only occasionally did unruly squads target Slav groups in north Italy, and such actions remained isolated incidents of uncontrolled minorities rather than systematic regime policies of discrimination¹⁶⁶. By contrast, Nazi ideology was monolithic in its acceptance of the biological origins of national identity. An individual was either German by blood or could never become so, even if they chose to adopt the cultural elements of *Deutschtum*¹⁶⁷. This was the ideological principle behind Hitler's rejection of the policies of Germanisation in conquered areas¹⁶⁸. The scientific ethos of German post-unification society penetrated the irrational nucleus of nationalist mythology, thus providing it with what appeared to many as unquestionable empirical credibility.

The above different definition of "nation" also explains why the two regimes diverged in the definition of their *racial* doctrines. In Italian Fascist ideology the distinction between race as a cultural product and race as a biological condition was never clear¹⁶⁹. As defender of European civilisation and the white race, the Italian nation was superior to the other European "races" (*stirpe*) because of its higher

¹⁶³ Vincent, A., *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford 1992), pp. 158ff; Mussolini, B., "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism", in Oakeshot (ed.), pp. 164-79

¹⁶⁴ See G. Gentile's criticism on the static notion of the nation as something existing and objective, in *Guerra e Fede*, pp. 55f; and Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 350ff

¹⁶⁵ De Felice, R., *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* (Turin 1972), pp. 64-78

¹⁶⁶ Segrè, C. G., *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1987), pp. 48-9

¹⁶⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 258-99. See also Maser, W., *Hitler's Mein Kampf. An Analysis* (London 1970), pp. 176-8; Ley, R., *Neuadel als Blut und Boden* (Munich 1930), passim; and Vincent, p. 158

¹⁶⁸ Hitler had repeatedly stated his rejection of Germanisation policies. See, for example, the relevant references quoted in Baynes, II, pp. 1144-7 (conversation with Lipski, 15 November 1933); Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 353ff; *Zweites Buch*, pp. 111ff. And, for a case-study, see the analysis of the occupation policies in Poland in Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism. A Documentary Reader*, vol. III: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination (1939-1945)* (Exeter 1988), pp. 922-96. Nevertheless, the SS had schemes for the re-Germanisation of those populations (Polish, Rumanian, Russian) who, although considered by the Nazi regime as "ethnically German", did not speak German anymore. See Schechtman, J., *European Population Transfers, 1939-1945* (New York 1946), pp. 255-363

cultural idea and history¹⁷⁰. Until 1935, however, Mussolini was highly critical of Hitler's biological racism, stressing that race was meaningless due to the common biological origins of all white peoples¹⁷¹. As he stated in the 1932 Doctrine of Fascism, the nation "was not a race, nor a geographically individualised region, but stock (*schiatte*) historically perpetuating itself"¹⁷². Against this ideological backdrop, it is difficult to comprehend the introduction of anti-Semitic policies by the PNF after 1936. From an ideological point of view, the "Manifesto of the Race" and the anti-Semitic legislation do not stand up to any serious criticism¹⁷³. The Italian Jews were a small and integrated group in the national community, with a high representation in the PNF hierarchy, as Balbo kept repeating to his *Capo* at the Grand Council in 1938-39¹⁷⁴. The shift in the policy towards them reflected a change in Mussolini's definition of race: from now on, Jews were *de facto* a biological category. Although there is no evidence that the Nazi leadership had exercised pressure for the introduction of the racial laws, Mussolini adopted an anti-Semitic legislation which bore little relevance to the original ideology of Italian Fascism. Not surprisingly, the legislation found an unqualified supporter in J. Evola, A. Sofici and R. Farinacci, who had always made their anti-Semitic beliefs clear. Surprisingly, even Bottai - by no means ideologically anti-Semitic - backed the legislation, although his support

¹⁶⁹ Neocleous, M., *Fascism* (London 1997), Ch. 2

¹⁷⁰ Scritti, II, 96 (speech in Trieste, 20 September 1920)

¹⁷¹ Scritti, IV, 350 (speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 12 September 1924); Missiroli, M., "Razza e cultura", *Circoli*, 7-8.1939, pp. 981ff, quoted in Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, p. 267; Mack Smith, *Guerre di Duce*, pp. 59ff; Michaelis, M., *Mussolini and the Jews. German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 59ff, 83f. See also Aloisi, P., *Journal*, 25 juillet 1932-14 juin 1936 (Paris 1957), p. 138

¹⁷² Mussolini, "Doctrine of Fascism", pp. 169f

¹⁷³ For the Manifesto of the Race see De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, pp. 541-2; Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 381-9 (for the text), 265-82 (for an assessment); Michaelis, pp. 152ff. For a general background of Mussolini's turn to anti-Semitism see Preti, L., *Impero fascista, africani ed ebrei* (Milan 1968), pp. 87-113, an excerpt of which is translated and cited in Sarti, R., *The Ax Within. Italian Fascism in Action* (London 1974), 197ff - the following references come from the translated part. See also the general criticism against Mussolini's anti-Semitic policies as a symptom of the decline of his regime (Michaelis, pp. 183f, 411ff); Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 241-82. Bernardini, G., "The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy", *Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977), pp. 431-53.

¹⁷⁴ De Grand, *Italian Nationalist Association*, pp. 34-6. For Balbo's arguments see Michaelis, M., "Il Maresciallo dell'aria Italo Balbo e la politica mussoliniana", *Storia Contemporanea*, 14 (1983), pp. 351ff

was more a sign of loyalty to Mussolini and did not endorse its violent side-effects¹⁷⁵. Yet a sizeable minority of leading Fascist figures, including Balbo, Federzoni and Acerbo, did speak out against the rationale of the laws, questioning their utility, their relevance to Fascist ideology, and asking for wide exemptions.¹⁷⁶ Yet, the cultural nature of the PNF's elitism did not rule out the partial integration of Jews into Italian society, through renouncing their religion and culture. The legislation, rigid in doctrine, was loosely and selectively implemented, falling short of the extremes of Nazi anti-Semitic policies¹⁷⁷. Especially in the periphery of the Italian *Impero*, implementation of the legislation depended heavily upon the views of the local Fascist administration. The example of Libya is indicative. Balbo - as Governor of the colony - remained reluctant to abide by the regime's official anti-Semitic line. Mussolini continued to criticise his lack of enthusiasm and to press for a more systematic application of the racial laws, but he did not take active steps to curb his Governor's liberal interpretation of the legislation. As a result, the Jewish community in Libya remained relatively insulated from the implications of the anti-Semitic legislation until Balbo's death in June 1940¹⁷⁸.

Italian racism did reflect a biological basis in the treatment of the Ethiopian peoples. The importance of the racial legislation in Ethiopia after 1936 went far beyond the rise of anti-Semitism in Italy. In many ways, the experience of managing a proper, extensive colonial empire after the formal occupation of Ethiopia in 1936 may be seen as the reason behind the inception of all racist legislation by the Italian Fascist regime¹⁷⁹. Its logic, however, was reminiscent of the conventional "white man's burden" colonial justification rather than of any rigid eliminationist doctrine - the black race was both culturally and biologically inferior to the "Aryan" race; therefore, its subjugation to white rule was legitimate and its separation from the white peoples essential. Here, cultural re-education would have had limited effect,

¹⁷⁵ De Grand, A. J., *Bottai e la cultura fascista* (Rome & Bari 1978), pp. 260-85. For the different shades in Italian fascism, between a still voluntarist notion of identity to the extremism of people like Guido Cogni and Julius Evola, see Preti in Sarti (ed.), *Ax Within*, pp. 201ff; Gregor, pp. 241-82

¹⁷⁶ Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 345-53

¹⁷⁷ Zuccotti, S., *The Italians and the Holocaust. Persecution, Rescue, Survival* (New York 1987); Steinberg, J., *All or Nothing. The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-43* (London 1990), passim, esp. 220-41; Michaelis, pp. 183ff; Preti in Sarti (ed.), *Ax Within*, p. 204

¹⁷⁸ De Felice, R., *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* (Turin 1972), pp. 263ff; Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 349ff

¹⁷⁹ Goglia, L., "Note sul razzismo coloniale fascista", *Storia Contemporanea*, 19 (1988), pp. 1223-66

because the black peoples were incapable of adopting the “superior” moral and cultural qualities of European civilisation¹⁸⁰. Some integration was again possible, but this could not rectify the biological shortcomings of the black race¹⁸¹. Fascism’s universal task was to civilise the inferior races and to defend the purity of western civilisation from racial miscegenation, which could harm the intellectual qualities of the white race; but not the eradicate them altogether¹⁸².

German racism, by contrast, was significantly more rigid, in the sense that it regarded culture as a reflection of the biological characteristics of a nation or a race. The Germanic *Kultur* was superior, because the Nordic race was by nature the élite of all other races, as well as the élite of white peoples¹⁸³. The problem lay with those of the “inferior” races who were feeding from, and poisoning, the blood of the German *Volk*¹⁸⁴. Since their biological faults rendered any attempt at integration both unfeasible and dangerous, they had to be eradicated for the sake of Germany and western civilisation. Therefore, Nazi racial elitism was directed against Jewish, Slav and Latin peoples (sometimes not excluding even Italians), against black peoples and Indians¹⁸⁵ as detrimental to the sanity of the German race.

What transformed the Jews from *one* possible target to the most hunted victim of Nazi racism had indeed a lot to do with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. According to Hitler’s thought, the Jews lacked a national and cultural identity, a common history and their own place (*Boden*) in the world. They were also equated in his worldview

¹⁸⁰ Preti in Sarti (ed), pp. 190f; Robertson, E. M., “Race as a Factor in Mussolini’s Policy in Africa and Europe”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), pp. 31-58

¹⁸¹ See the plan to grant a “special” kind of Italian citizenship to the people of the northern provinces of Libya (in return for their acceptance of their subordinate status), in Preti in Sarti (ed.), pp. 195ff

¹⁸² OO, XVI, 158f; XIX, 266. For the cultural origins of this belief (back to the nationalism of the 1900s and D’Annunzio), see Hayes, P. M., *Fascism* (London 1973), p. 20f

¹⁸³ For this narrow definition of the Aryan race see Hitler, A., *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, edited by Jäckel, E., Kuhn, A. (Stuttgart 1980), pp. 620ff; Hitler, *Führung und Gefolgschaft* (Berlin 1934), quoted in Struve, p. 421; Spengler, O., *Decline of the West*, and *Jahre der Entscheidung* (Berlin 1933), excerpt of which is translated and cited in Griffin, *Fascism*, pp. 112-4; Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 74-6 (speech to the Industry Club at Düsseldorf, 27 January 1932); Günther, H. F. K., *Kleine Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (Munich 1929), pp. 9-25. For the idea that the German *Kultur* (as anything Germanic) is superior to other equivalent notions of other nations and races, see Herf, Ch. 8

¹⁸⁴ On this issue see Glaser, pp. 151-3

¹⁸⁵ Baynes, II, pp. 988-9 (interview with O. Strasser, 21 May 1930)

with the internationalist conspiratorial project of world communism¹⁸⁶. A. Rosenberg, the chief Nazi ideologue of anti-Semitism, had since 1918 spoken of the “Jewish menace” for Germany and the whole Europe, advocating a systematic policy of exclusion and expulsion. His major works, *Myth of the Twentieth Century* and *Pest in Russia*, reflected a systematic attempt to lend scientific validity to an irrational prejudice and thus bring it to the forefront of popular nationalist feeling. At the same time, H. Himmler’s idea of a racially re-organised and purified German society contained the seeds of an eliminationist, mystical attitude to anti-Semitism which was reproduced in the SS organisations and was allowed significant latitude in the last years of the Nazi regime¹⁸⁷. However, Nazism was not the only *source* of the anti-Semitic eliminationist ideology which led to the persecution and annihilation of the European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. Other factors, which had been assimilated - rather than produced - by Nazism facilitated the radicalisation of anti-Semitic tendencies within the German society. The survival or revival of atavistic notions of “purity” and “wholeness”, the discarding of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the belief in the ideal of a “blood community” and the rejection of cultural concepts of nationhood, were long-lasting legacies of German radical nationalism since unification. By the turn of the century, the Jewish “threat” had been invested with more far-reaching qualities: the Jews were morally, politically, culturally, racially, even economically “deviant”. Anti-Semitic hatred was still abstract and divorced from action (i.e. physical elimination), but it had become so central to the “cognitive model” of German nationalism that became an unquestionable element of social attitudes, passed on uncritically from one generation to the other¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁶ Hitler, *Zweites Buch*, pp. 153-4, 219ff; *Mein Kampf*, Ch. 14. For the identification of bolshevism with the Jews see numerous references in Baynes - for example, I, pp. 733 (interview with *United Press*, 27 November 1935); II, 1380 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 20 February 1938), 1471 (Proclamation at the *Parteitag*, Nuremberg 6 September 1938). Similar comments were made during the Second World War - see, for example, in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 2000 (speech in Berlin, 16 March 1943), 2204 (Proclamation to the German People, 24 February 1945). See also later in this chapter, Section IV

¹⁸⁷ Cecil, R., *The Myth of the Master Race. Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London 1972), pp. 162-86; Manvell, R., Fraenkel, H., *Heinrich Himmler* (London 1965); Ackermann, J., *Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen 1970); “Heinrich Himmler: Reichsführer - SS”, in Smelser, R., Zitelmann R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 100ff

¹⁸⁸ Glaser, pp. 220-30; Pulzer, P. G. J., *Jews and the German State. The political history of a minority* (Oxford 1992); Goldhagen, W., *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London 1996), pp. 27-79; Knox, “Conquest”, p. 30. On the origins of the ideology of anti-Semitism in Germany see the classic studies of Stern, F., *The Politics of Cultural Despair*

This again was not an exclusively *German* phenomenon. In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of other European societies often ran amok with anti-Semitic obsessions, originating from a resurgence of extreme nationalist sentiment¹⁸⁹. Yet, where German society had already begun to diverge was in its combined belief in the élite character of Germandom and in the “racial”-biological source of its superiority. The institutionalisation of the Jewry as the scapegoat for every social, economic and political setback was strengthened by the widespread phobia towards communism and bolshevism, which were regarded as a Jewish scheme for international domination. The 1918 revolution and the subsequent left-wing agitation throughout the period of the Weimar Republic bolstered popular beliefs in the alleged international conspiracy of the Jews against the German nation. At the same time, the atmosphere of crisis in interwar Germany was furthered compounded by the two economic crises and the threat of a communist revolution which, unlike in Italy, had not abated by the time of the seizure of power¹⁹⁰. The publication of the fabricated *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the early 1920s acted as a confirmation of the suspicions about Jewish intentions which were rife in sections of German society. Nazi anti-Semitic ideology appealed to all these irrational fears and presented the Jewish “threat” as a lethal challenge to the “mission” of the German nation. The Abel interviews highlights that strong anti-Semitic beliefs were reflected in the discourse of half the respondents. However, a significant additional number came to an endorsement of anti-Semitism through resentment for defeat, the 1918 revolution and the Weimar Republic, which they were ready to accept as indications of a international Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy¹⁹¹. The Nazi regime subsequently radicalised these perceptions by investing them with grotesque pseudo-scientific metaphors - Jews were described as a “malignant poison”, “bacillus infecting the life of peoples”, “the race-tuberculosis of nations”, “pest”, “bacteria invading the body of

(Berkeley 1961); and Mosse, G. L., *The Crisis of German Ideology* (London 1966). Cf. Rocco, *Scritti*, p. 1101

¹⁸⁹ Mosse, G. L., *Towards the Final Solution* (London 1978); Lyttelton, A., “The ‘crisis of bourgeois society’ and the origins of fascism”, pp. 12-3

¹⁹⁰ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 226-8

¹⁹¹ Merkl, pp. 169, 487ff, 522

the *Volk*” and “rotten”¹⁹². The morbid biological account of national life as a “closed” organism rendered all alien influences or interventions to its reproduction parasitic and contagious. Only complete eradication could guarantee the health of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and of the whole European civilisation. In this sense, defence of the nation was not enough. Expansion through force and destruction for the removal of the cultural and biological threat was perceived as a historic necessity consigned to the German nation. Nazi Germany as an elite nation, race and *Kultur* had the historic duty to salvage Europe from cultural and racial annihilation¹⁹³.

IV: Choosing targets: fascist expansionism and the notion of living space

So far we have concentrated our analysis on the generic ideological factors in the fascist worldview which produced and explained the general propensity of the Italian and German regimes for territorial expansion. However, fascist ideology also needed a conceptual formula which could fuse the abstract tendency to territorial expansion with a more concrete and intelligible set of expansionist goals. In this respect too fascist ideology continued its function of annexing pre-existing themes

¹⁹² In sequence: Baynes, II, p. 1338-9 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 30 January 1937), 1601 (speech in the Wilhelmshafen Townhall, 1 April 1939); Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 2005 (talks with Horthy, 10 April 1943), 2083 (radio address, 30 January 1944); Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 88-90. See also Eckart, D., *Ein Vermächtnis* (Munich 1928), pp. 214-9, translated in Mosse, G. L., *Nazi Culture. Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (London 1966), pp. 75-8. For the biological idea of the community as an organism in Nazi ideology see Weindling, P., “Understanding Nazi Racism: Precursors and Perpetrators”, in Burleigh, M. (ed.), *Confronting the Nazi Past. New Debates on Modern German History* (London 1996), pp. 66-83

¹⁹³ Baynes, I, 668 (interview with the United Press, 27 November 1935); 707 (speech in 1937 Nuremberg Party Rally, 10 September 1937). See also, for an analysis of these ideas, Goldhagen, pp. 80-128

and currents into its mythical core of elitism and violent activism¹⁹⁴. Hence, the idea of *space* was gradually put forward as the pivotal object of fascist expansion and the ultimate measure of fascism's success in revitalising the national community and in promoting its historic universal mission.

The notion of spatial expansion comprised two different levels of justification and legitimisation. The first, *abstract* level focused on space as agriculturally usable land suitable for migration and resettlement of the excess population of the metropolis. It was related to demographic factors and underscored the need to find an effective relation between territory and population through expansion in underdeveloped, thinly-populated areas. It was also put forward as a technique to bring about a fairer re-distribution of natural resources in the world among the alleged demographically strong and culturally prominent nations. The second, *historic-ideological* level of justification of spatial expansion centred on the notion of space as a specific geographical entity, determined by the historic ties of a nation with its adjacent territories. This was an essentially irredentist argument, but not in its limited ethnic sense or its traditional emphasis on populations. It was rather an argument which used the historic precedent of a nation's control over a given territory in order to justify its right to "redeem" it at a much later stage in history, even in defiance of the principle of popular self-determination. This fascist notion of historic irredentism was directly derived from the ideological concept of elitism. It linked the acquisition of these territories with the fascist universal project and justified the subjugation of the populations inhabiting them to the professedly more "advanced" fascist nations as a natural necessity.

The production of an ideology of spatial expansion in these terms by the two fascist movements was a long process of digesting and absorbing diverse ideological currents into a new synthesis. The idea of space *per se* was by no means a fascist conceptual innovation. It had previously informed the expansionist programmes of various nationalist movements in the two countries which lingered from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and continued to be influential until the First World War. However, the fascist notion of space went significantly further than its

¹⁹⁴ Mosse, G. L., "Towards a General Theory of Fascism", in Mosse (ed.), *International Fascism. New Thoughts and New Approaches* (London & Beverly Hills 1979), pp.1-41; Eatwell, "Towards a New

ideological predecessors. It was transformed into an ultimate ideological symbolism of fascist expansion, bridging the traditional nationalist goal of completing national unification with the fascist millenarian aspirations for a new international order¹⁹⁵. In this sense, it is important to monitor how the notion of space was shaped in Italian and German fascist ideologies, acknowledging debts to previous nationalist movements and thinkers but also highlighting how it became the symbolic manifestation of all fundamental priorities and principles which informed the worldviews of the two regimes.

Italy: the idea of *spazio vitale* and the Mediterranean project

The idea of space in demographic and historic terms was introduced in Italian nationalism by the “new” radical generation of nationalist thinkers who made their appearance felt in the first decade of the twentieth century. The need for space as agricultural land for Italy’s excess population and as solution to the problem of emigration had been a crucial element of legitimisation for Italy’s colonial policies since the 1880s, giving rise to the ideology of migrationist colonialism in parts of Africa¹⁹⁶. However, the new radical nationalist ideology of the *novecento* movements linked the objective demographic and economic rationale of spatial expansion with a metaphysical notion of historic greatness and imperial destiny. The influence of leading figures of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) - most notably, Enrico Corradini - on Mussolini’s expansionist ideas has been acknowledged by a plethora of works on the intellectual basis of Fascist ideology¹⁹⁷. Corradini’s conception of Italy as a “proletarian nation” was the first synthesis of the abstract and the historic aspects of space ideology. Italy as a young nation, he argued, had been entitled to a

Model of Generic Fascism”, pp. 189-91

¹⁹⁵ Wilford, “Fascism”, pp. 185ff; Eatwell, R., “Fascism”, in Eatwell, R., Wright, A. (eds.), *Contemporary Political Ideologies* (London 1993), pp. 169-91

¹⁹⁶ For more details see, in this study, Ch. 1, Section Vb

¹⁹⁷ Adamson, W., “Avant-garde political rhetorics: pre-war culture in Florence as a source of post-war fascism”, *Journal of European Ideas*, 16 (1993), pp. 753-7; Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 95-126; Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology”, pp. 339f; Noether, E. P., “The Intellectual Dimension of Italian Nationalism: An Overview”, and Cunsolo, R. S., “Italian Nationalism in Historical Perspective”, *History of European Ideas*, 16 (1993), pp. 779-84 and 759-66 respectively; De Grand, *Italian*

very limited share of the world's resources by the established "plutocratic" great powers. This reality was unacceptable not simply for economic and demographic reasons but also as an insult to Italy's past grandeur and historic significance. In this sense, the legacy of the Roman empire redirected the modern Italian people to the Mediterranean basin in search of both living space and a new period of national greatness¹⁹⁸.

However, there were limits to the appeal of Corradini's ideas in pre-1914 Italian society. For a start, in spite of the ANI's consolidation after 1908, the movement continued to be regarded as an intellectual, elitist organisation, divorced from action and with limited impact upon popular nationalist perceptions¹⁹⁹. Furthermore, Corradini's influence on the ideological profile of the ANI had already started to wane by 1910-12, when the more conservative attitude to foreign policy epitomised by Federzoni and Rocco gained the upper hand in the organisation. The ideas of imperialist nationalism and Africanism which inspired Corradini's vision of spatial expansion became less relevant to the nationalist war agenda of Adriatic expansion which underpinned the opposition of the ANI to liberal policies during and after the First World War²⁰⁰. Finally, Corradini's emphasis on the primacy of a foreign policy conceived in imperialist, palingenetic terms was not shared by a large section of the radical nationalist movement. Prominent figures of the *novecento*, such as Papini and Malaparte, continued to view foreign policy and expansion as a means subjected to the goal of a revolutionary social transformation, rejecting the traditionalist Roman inspiration of Corradini's project²⁰¹.

Nationalist Association, passim; Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, pp. 58, 76; Neocleous, p. 22; Eatwell, *Fascism*, pp. 26; Knox, "Conquest", pp. 17-8

¹⁹⁸ See "The Nationalist Blueprint for a New Italy", programmatic declaration of the *Italian Nationalist Association*, translated and reprinted in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 37-8; "Nationalism and the Syndicates", in Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 159-63. See also, De Grand, *Italian Nationalist Association*, pp. 11ff; Saladino, S., "Italy", in Rogger, H., Weber, E. (eds.), *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (London 1965), pp. 210ff; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, pp. 163-4

¹⁹⁹ De Grand, *Italian Nationalist Association*, Chs. 1-3; Gaeta, F., "L'Associazione Nazionalista Italiana", in Gentile, E. (ed.), *L'Italia giolittiana. La storia e la critica* (Rome & Bari 1977), pp. 253-68

²⁰⁰ De Grand, *Italian Nationalist Association*, Ch. 3; Adamson, "avant-garde", pp. 755-7

²⁰¹ See, for example, Malaparte, C., "Fascism's European Mission", in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 48-9; "Mussolini and National Syndicalism", in Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 225-41 (esp. pp. 235ff). For an analysis of this internal antithesis see Sternhell, Z., *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*.

In this sense, Mussolini's revival of the principle of space in the post-1918 period, albeit not conceptually novel, was politically significant in that it popularised a previously elitist concept and transformed it into the fulcrum of a radical mass ideology of expansion. After 1919 he underlined the importance of acquiring more living space as a demographic necessity for the expanding Italian people. In the Second Declaration of San Sepolcro he contrasted Italy's meagre territory and natural resources with the vast lands of the British empire, calling for a forward policy of expansion in order to rectify this dangerous disproportion between "plutocratic" and "proletarian" nations²⁰². A year later, in a major speech delivered at Trieste, he justified the demographic reasons behind the Fascist demand for expansion, calling for a more equitable ratio of territory to people for postwar Italy²⁰³. Although after the acquisition of power he sponsored an ambitious, if ineffective policy of increasing agriculturally usable land (through land reclamation) and production (through the "battle of grain"), he believed that neither the exploitation of the existing territory alone nor the control of births were effective solutions to the demographic and food problem of postwar Italy²⁰⁴. Spatial expansion was the right and the proof of a demographically and culturally flourishing people, as he explained in September 1928. In the same speech, titled "the Number as Force", he described any population decrease as a prelude to the decay and cultural annihilation of a nation²⁰⁵. Expansion, therefore, for demographic-economic reasons was an open-ended process, intending to accommodate the existing excess population and to

From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution (Princeton 1994), esp. pp. 163-75; Hamilton, pp. 51ff; Saladino, "Italy", pp. 236ff

²⁰² For the Declarations of San Sepolcro see OO, XII, pp. 311-4 (23 March 1919); excerpts are reprinted in Santarelli, E. (ed.), *Scritti politici*, pp. 184-90; translated in Baron Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches (November 1914 - August 1923)* (London & Toronto 1923), pp. 78ff; and excerpts in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 34-5

²⁰³ Scritti, II, 95-109 (Discorso di Trieste, 20 September 1920), also in Santarelli (ed.), pp. 193ff

²⁰⁴ See relevant comments in OO, XVIII, 396ff; Scritti, VI, 37-77 (*Discorso dell'Ascensione*, delivered at the Chamber of Deputies, 26 May 1927); and "Discorso di Roma", reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), pp. 254-64. For Mussolini's demographic policy see Knox, "Conquest", pp. 18-20; "Il fascismo e la politica estera italiana", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S. (eds.), *La politica estera italiana (1860-1985)* (Bologna 1991), pp. 295f; and, for a self-justification, OO, XXXIV, pp. 124ff ("Doctrine of Fascism", June 1932), translated in Mussolini, B., "Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism", in Oakeshott, M. (ed.), *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (New York 1949), pp. 164-79

²⁰⁵ OO, XXIII, 216ff, reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), pp. 246-54 (9 September 1928); excerpts translated in Griffin (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 58-60. Cf. similar comments in OO, XXII, 364ff (speech in Rome, 26 May 1927)

provide the necessary space for the - hopefully - expanding population of a regenerated Italy²⁰⁶.

At the meeting at San Sepolcro in May 1919 Mussolini also spoke of the need to expand in order to give Italy a “place in the world” amongst the great powers²⁰⁷. In contrast to the ANI’s pessimism about the prospects of the Latin peoples in their competition with the Nordic and Slavic races, the *Duce* professed his faith in Italy’s future by prescribing the acquisition of living space as the necessary precondition for domestic recovery and international ascendancy²⁰⁸. War, he claimed, had transformed the “new” Italy into an “imperial power”. It had highlighted the historic quality of the Italian people and revealed its glorious destiny to conquer and dominate²⁰⁹. The significance of acquiring new territory was not simply economic but also symbolic. Apart from completing the process of unification which had been initiated with the *Risorgimento*, spatial expansion would build upon Italy’s gains after the war and consolidate her position among the great powers by using territorial aggrandisement as the currency of great power status²¹⁰. The state should strive to expand its territory, he argued in 1929, for the welfare of its thriving population and for the everlasting glory of the whole nation in its struggle for greatness²¹¹.

To this abstract notion of *spazio vitale*, which appeared to justify interminable expansion without specific objects, Mussolini gradually added a more concrete historic and geopolitical focus. The June 1919 Programme of the *Fasci di Combattimento* made vague references to a “foreign policy calculated to improve Italy’s position” and to safeguard her vital strategic interests²¹². However, by that time Mussolini had already started developing the idea of a Mediterranean *mare nostrum*, extending from the Adriatic to the north African lands, as historically belonging to Italy. Again at San Sepolcro he explained that Italy’s claim to great-

²⁰⁶ Scritti, II, 7-10 (“Posizioni e obiettivi”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 28 March 1919)

²⁰⁷ OO, XII, 313-4 (San Sepolcro, 23 March 1919)

²⁰⁸ For ANI’s ideas on this matter see De Grand, *Italian National Association*, pp. 10ff. For Mussolini’s relevant arguments see the analysis in Knox, “Conquest”, pp. 17-8

²⁰⁹ OO, XII, 77ff (speech in Bologna, 20 December 1918); 312-3 (San Sepolcro)

²¹⁰ OO, XVI, 106ff (“Per essere liberi”, published in *Popolo d’Italia*, 8 January 1921); Scritti, II, 133-5 (“Legionari di Ronchi”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 5 January 1921)

²¹¹ OO, XXIV, 5ff (speech to the Assembly of the Fascist regime, 10 March 1929)

²¹² Reprinted in Delzell (ed.), pp. 12-3; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il rivoluzionario* (Turin 1965), pp. 744f

power status was derived from history. The Mediterranean basin was her historic living space, he argued, threatening to oust the British and limit the influence of France in the region if they attempted to impede Italy's rightful expansion in the region²¹³. The June 1919 Programme of the *Fasci* expressly stated Fascism's opposition to the "plutocratic powers" in the region which threatened Italy's interests and impeded the will of the Italian people to dominate the region²¹⁴. The heritage of the Roman past directed the forces of the new Italy to its historic birthplace, the "sea of Rome", in order to commence the third Italian universal civilisation²¹⁵. Emphasis on the official Italian claims to Dalmatia at Versailles was justifiable only as a means to ensure the country's land frontiers first and a prelude to expansion in the whole Mediterranean region, including both European and colonial lands²¹⁶. The heritage of the first (Roman empire) and the second (Papacy) civilisation of Rome rendered modern Italy universal *par excellence*, with a mission to "spread our gospel to other lands where Italians always lived"²¹⁷. By 1922 the fusion of the abstract notion of *spazio vitale* with the historic irredentist notion of *mare nostrum* had been essentially completed. In his last major speech before the March to Rome in October 1922, the *Duce* spoke of the Fascist myth of the nation as a positive utopia, combining the significance of territory with the spiritual and historic qualities of the Italian people. "It is not simply a matter of size", he added with reference to territorial expansion, but of the totality of national forces derived from the glorious Italian history and the spiritually rejuvenated "new" Italian nation²¹⁸. Less than a year later, this time from his responsible position as Prime Minister, he justified the violent occupation of the island of Corfu by blaming the Greek government for not appreciating that "Corfu

²¹³ OO, XIII, 143 (speech in Milan, 22 May 1919); Knox, "Conquest", pp. 19-20

²¹⁴ Published in *Popolo d'Italia*, 6 June 1919

²¹⁵ OO, XV, 217 (speech in Trieste, 9 September 1920); Scritti, V, 183-91 (speech in Rome for the anniversary of the Italian victory in the First World War, 4 November 1925). For the "cult of Rome" in the Fascist regime see Gentile, *Culto del littorio*, pp. 146-54

²¹⁶ See his speech in Florence (9 October 1919), in Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), pp. 107ff

²¹⁷ Domarus, M., *Mussolini und Hitler. Zwei Wege - Gleiches Ende* (Würzburg 1977), p. 65 (speech in Milan, 5 May 1921)

²¹⁸ OO, XVIII, 453-8/ Scritti, II, 339-48/ Santarelli (ed.), pp. 220ff ("Discorso di Napoli", 24 October 1922)

had been Venetian for four hundred years” before becoming part of the modern Greek state²¹⁹.

As for the geopolitical dimension in Mussolini’s vision of Mediterranean expansion, it originated from the growing awareness of the multiple external obstacles to Italy’s territorial ambitions in the region. It was not just the British and the French who forestalled Italy’s access to her historic *spazio vitale*. Other, lesser powers, according to Mussolini, had been allowed to enjoy privileges which had been denied to Italy in the past and especially after the peace settlement. Spain controlled one major exit point from the Mediterranean and had direct access to the vast resources of the Atlantic ocean²²⁰. At the same time, the new state of Yugoslavia, in itself a creation of the Peace Treaties, pursued a policy of expansionist greed against vital Italian interests in the Adriatic sea, impeding the realisation of Italy’s historic claims over Dalmatia and jeopardising her strategic position in an area crucial to her national defence²²¹. In this respect, expansion in the Mediterranean was also a prerequisite for the country’s rise to international prominence as it would ensure favourable strategic conditions for Italy’s struggle against the other contenders for her historic living space. This geopolitical notion, crystallised in Mussolini’s thinking before the March on Rome, was subsequently enriched with the idea of Italy’s geographic “imprisonment” in the Mediterranean and the necessity of securing access to the oceans²²². The product of this ideological fusion was a concept of *spazio vitale* which dictated expansion into crucial control points of the wider Mediterranean and Red Sea areas, in order to alter the balance of power in the region and establish Italy’s strategic advantage. Such arguments became more pronounced in Mussolini’s more radical expansionist discourse in the 1930s and especially from 1935 onwards²²³. In his major programmatic speech at Milan in November 1936 he justified Italy’s vast aspirations in the Mediterranean basin as “a struggle for life and death”, in contrast to Britain’s interest in the region as simply a sea-route to the

²¹⁹ Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 115f (5 September 1923)

²²⁰ OO, XVI, 300ff (speech in Milan, 3 May 1921)

²²¹ Scritti, II, 55-7 (“Alle Alpi Giulie”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 22 February 1920); II, 113 (“Ciò che rimane e ciò che verrà”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 13 November 1920)

²²² For Mussolini’s earliest programmatic declarations of this kind see his speech in Florence (19 June 1923) in Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), pp. 328ff

²²³ See in more detail, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IV

Indian Ocean. Italy, he added, was an island surrounded by the Mediterranean with no other exit to the world. If her world-power ambitions were to be taken seriously, control of her land and maritime *spazio vitale* was the geopolitical and historic key to greatness²²⁴.

The doctrine of Italy's right to expand in the Mediterranean was further strengthened by Mussolini's notion of a spiritual and cultural hierarchy of races (*stirpe*). His references to "thinly populated areas" surrounding the Mediterranean did not simply amount to a demographic justification for Italy's claim to a fairer share of territory in proportion to her population²²⁵. In a permanent struggle between cultures, Italian civilisation possessed a historic heritage which rendered her the *de facto* spiritually dominant force in the Mediterranean. Prior to the March on Rome Mussolini had made ample use of the myth of Rome as a metaphor of Fascist Italy's historic universal legacy²²⁶. In his Trieste speech in September 1920 he described Rome's universal task as "yet unfulfilled", alluding to Fascism's responsibility as the true heir to Italy's glorious past²²⁷. In February 1921 he spoke of Rome as the historically dominating force in European culture, while a year later he went as far as equating Fascism with the Roman past, thus legitimising modern Italy's right to expand in the Mediterranean²²⁸. The African lands were underdeveloped because the peoples inhabiting them lacked the demographic and cultural momentum to exploit their resources and prosper, both in numbers and political power²²⁹. The tendency to imperial expansion was a "natural law" for the strongest peoples, as he noted in the *Doctrine of Fascism* published in 1932; it was the expression of the vitality of one people and the acceptance of inferiority on part of the subjugated populations in the

²²⁴ Reprinted in Santarelli (ed.), pp. 297-301, excerpts translated in Delzell (ed.), pp. 201-2. Cf. Scritti, III, 98 ("The problem of emigration", speech in Milan, 2 April 1923), where Mussolini used the same phrase ("matter of life or death")

²²⁵ OO, XVI, 106 ("Per essere liberi", *Popolo d'Italia*, 8 January 1921)

²²⁶ See the analysis in Simonini, pp. 96-9

²²⁷ Scritti, II, 101ff (Discorso di Trieste, 20 September 1920); Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), pp. 108ff

²²⁸ OO, XVI, 159ff (Discorso di Torino, 6 February 1921); XVIII, 161ff ("Past and Future", *Popolo d'Italia*, 21 April 1922)

²²⁹ Ludwig, E., *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Milan 1950), pp. 58-64

conquered areas²³⁰. At the same time, even in Europe there was a fierce struggle between the various “racial masses”, as he termed them, for domination. Racist undertones were evident in Mussolini’s discourse long before the official shift of the regime towards apartheid and anti-Semitic policies from 1936 onwards. As early as in September 1920, speaking to the people of Trieste, he described the Slav peoples as “inferior” and “barbaric”, unworthy of their territory but extremely dangerous in their continued demographic and territorial expansion in central and south Europe²³¹. Seven years later, he demanded that the Italian population reach at least the sixty million level in the near future through the intensified emphasis of the regime on marriages and births. According to his argument, this was a historic imperative in order to compete with the rising tide of Slav and non-white peoples in Europe and in the colonial empires²³². The demographic and spiritual regeneration of the Italian people was the *conditio sine qua non* for greatness and for fulfilling the historic mission of dominating the Mediterranean *mare nostrum*. With the introduction of racial legislation, first in the *Impero* and then in the Italian mainland too, Mussolini’s notion of “race hierarchy” acquired even more rigid qualities. In October 1938 he justified the racial policies of his regime as a historic necessity, arguing that only in this way could the Italian “racial mass” be protected and dominate the struggle for the shaping of future Europe. Italy’s historic and geopolitical *spazio vitale* in the wider Mediterranean region had to be either reclaimed from other countries and populations or asserted in fierce competition with other powers²³³. In this sense, it became a metaphor for superiority and vitality, blending the *abstract* Fascist ideas of elitism, violent activism and historic mission with a *specific* historic and geopolitical focus of expansion.

²³⁰ Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”, pp. 164ff; Scritti, II, 149-50 (“Dopo il natale di sangue”, second speech in Trieste, 6 February 1921); OO, XXVIII, 30 (speech in Lucania, 27 August 1936)

²³¹ Scritti, II, 95-100, Santarelli, pp. 196-7 (Discorso di Trieste, 20 September 1920)

²³² Scritti, VI, 43ff (Discorso dell’Ascensione, 26 May 1927). Cf. his speech in Trieste (6 February 1932), in Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), pp. 121ff

²³³ OO, XXIX, 185-95 (speech to the PNF General Council, 15 September 1938), also in Santarelli (ed.), pp. 301ff

Germany: the quest for *Lebensraum* in the east

The idea of living space (*Lebensraum*) has been widely acknowledged as the most consistent ideological current in Hitler's expansionist vision. The conquest of *Lebensraum* in the east for agricultural settlement has been described by a number of historians as the unalterable basic tenet underpinning his foreign policy ideas since the early 1920s²³⁴. By the time Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* the idea of spatial expansion for the acquisition of living space had already been equated in his mind with the notion of *Drang nach Osten*. As a continental power, Germany could only acquire sufficient *Lebensraum* at the expense of the Soviet Union, in order to nourish her growing population, expand her natural resources and strengthen her ability for self-defence²³⁵. He annexed an economic argument to his analysis - neither colonies nor foreign trade could enhance the country's natural resources and improve living conditions for the German people. Only further spatial expansion could provide a just and lasting solution to the problem²³⁶. Fate, he added, was assisting Germany's necessity for eastern expansion by handing Russia to bolshevism and thus weakening the spiritual power of the country and its leadership²³⁷.

As it emerged from *Mein Kampf* and later from his *Second Book*, Hitler's *Lebensraum* ideology coalesced a plethora of pre-existing German radical nationalist currents and personal preoccupations into a new and outwardly coherent synthesis. The romantic idea of *Blut und Boden*, namely the mystical union between blood and soil, had traditionally been a constant theme of *völkisch* nationalism and gained significance in the post-1918 period²³⁸. During the

²³⁴ Weinberg, G. L., *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 30-53; Rich, N., *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. 1: *Ideology, the Nazi State and the Course of Expansion* (London 1973), Ch. 1; Aigner, D., "Hitler's Ultimate Aims - A Programme of World Dominion?", in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Basingstoke & London 1985), pp. 251-266

²³⁵ Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf*, translated by D. C. Watt (London 1972); Maser, W., *Hitler's Mein Kampf. An Analysis* (London 1970), pp. 139-41; Weinberg (ed.), *Hitlers Zweites Buch*, pp. 102ff

²³⁶ Jäckel, E., Kuhn, A. (eds.), *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen, 1905-1924* (Stuttgart 1980), pp. 421-7; Weinberg (ed.), *Zweites Buch*, pp. 53ff

²³⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 598ff

²³⁸ Glaser, pp. 154-62; Smith, W. D., *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford 1986), pp. 212-3; Mosse, G. L., *The Crisis of German Ideology* (London 1966), pp. 246ff; Hamilton, pp. 91-

Wilhelminian period various ideologies of living space made their appearance, emphasising the agricultural benefits of spatial expansion, the need for economic autarky and the possibility of resettling excess population in the conquered areas²³⁹. The ideal of Pan-Germanism, as expressed by the *Alldeutscher Verband*, presupposed the conquest of the “historic living space” of the German *Volk* in eastern and central Europe²⁴⁰. At the same time, cultural and racial justifications for the expansion of the German nation in Europe abounded in pre-1918 radical nationalism, albeit with far less popular appeal than during the Nazi period. The *Alldeutscher Verband* spoke openly of the biological and cultural “inferiority” of the Slav races, while after 1908 anti-Semitic references became more widespread in the organisations’ declarations. The geopolitical notion of *Lebensraum*, as systematised by Friedrich Ratzel by the 1890s, justified expansion in social Darwinist terms, in the context of an eternal struggle between cultures and peoples²⁴¹. Even such a highly-respected liberal figure as Max Weber advocated the need “to win the greatest elbowroom” so long as *free* territory and economic regions still existed. Although Weber’s idea differed from the *völkisch* notion of aggressive *Lebensraum* expansion, it did accept the inevitable struggle between peoples for a “space in the sun” and saw expansion, both in spatial and economic terms, as the vital element in Germany’s international ascendancy²⁴².

However, there was a significant qualitative difference in the pre-Nazi ideologies of *Lebensraum* and Hitler’s concept of “living space”. As we have already seen, until the 1920s *Lebensraum* formed only part of the legitimisation of Germany’s expansionist ambitions, caught in the political dilemma between continental and overseas expansion (*Weltpolitik*). It had also absorbed different ideological undercurrents - such as migrationist elements, social Darwinism, historic justifications and racist connotations - but lacked a systematic integration of these diverse ideas into a coherent argument which could project spatial

168. For original references to the concept see various excerpts in Griffin, R., *Fascism* (Oxford & New York 1995), Part II, A, i-ii; B, ii (esp. p. 147)

²³⁹ Smith, W. D., Chs. 5, 7

²⁴⁰ These issues are discussed, in this study, in Ch. 1, Section Vb. Cf. Hitler’s comments in Weinberg (ed.), *Zweites Buch*, pp. 72f

²⁴¹ Smith, W. D., pp. 146ff

²⁴² Mayer, J. P., *Max Weber and German Politics* (London 1943), pp. 81ff; Smith, W. D., 155-60

expansion as an all-embracing solution to Germany's domestic and international problems. In this sense, Hitler's contribution to the notion of *Lebensraum* was twofold. First, he amalgamated and radicalised pre-existing ideological, economic, historic, racist and geopolitical principles into a congruous system of thought which prescribed eastern expansion as the fundamental answer to Germany's grievances and the door to world power. Second, like Mussolini, he popularised the previously marginal and vague idea of living space by placing it in the forefront of the political programme of the Nazi mass movement.

Having said that, the production of the elaborate ideology of spatial expansion found in *Mein Kampf* and later in his *Second Book*²⁴³ followed a long process of integration and systematisation in the early 1920s²⁴⁴. The DAP Programme of 1920, to which Hitler's contribution should not be exaggerated, restated the conventional irredentist argument of uniting "all Germans" and added only vague references to "land and territory", including colonies, as solution to the country's space problem²⁴⁵. The absence of any allusion to eastern expansion originated from Hitler's initial obsession with the Versailles treaty, as a result of which he regarded - apart from France - "England [sic] and America" as the "absolute opponents" of the Reich²⁴⁶. There are various indications that in the 1919-1921 period he was not averse to the idea of an alliance with Russia²⁴⁷ against the main powers guaranteeing the Versailles settlement. The demographic aspect of *Lebensraum* permeated his references to spatial expansion in 1920-21, underscoring the unfavourable ratio of population to land in the post-Versailles Germany, but the prescription of spatial expansion lacked a concrete geographic

²⁴³ Weinberg, G. L. (ed.), *Hitlers zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (Stuttgart 1961). See also Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 34ff

²⁴⁴ For this process see Stoakes, G., "The Evolution of Hitler's Ideas on Foreign Policy, 1919-1925", in Stachura, P. D. (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London 1978), pp. 22-47; Schubert, G., *Anfänge nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik* (Cologne 1963)

²⁴⁵ Feder, G., *Das Program der NSDAP und seine weltanschaulichen Grundlagen* (Munich 1932), translated and reprinted in Baynes, I, pp. 102-5. See also Stoakes, pp. 36f, for an analysis.

²⁴⁶ Phelps, R., "Hitler als Parteiredner in Jahre 1920", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 11 (1963), pp. 289-92 (speech to Munich party-group, 10 December 1919). See also, in general, Kuhn, A., *Hitlers Aussenpolitisches Programm* (Stuttgart 1970)

²⁴⁷ Stoakes, pp. 30-5; Knox, M., "Conquest, Domestic and Foreign, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 20ff

character²⁴⁸. In contrast, Hitler had already developed the two central ideological themes of his worldview - anti-Semitism and anti-bolshevism. The myth of an “international Jewish conspiracy” underpinned his earlier anti-Semitic comments in 1920 and induced him to speak of a fundamental historic struggle between nationalism and internationalism (epitomised by the Jews), in which Germany would lead the fight against the latter²⁴⁹. At the same time, bolshevism was also accused of internationalist and expansionist ambitions, allegedly promoting the ideal of a vast Russian empire in eastern and central Europe. By 1920 Hitler had fused the two concepts into one single enemy (bolshevism was perceived as the vehicle for Jewish international domination) and for that reason excluded the possibility of an alliance between Germany and a Bolshevik Russia. He did not, however, rule out a collapse of the Bolshevik regime which would pave the way for a *rapprochement*²⁵⁰.

The identification of Russia with bolshevism and the Jews in Hitler’s mind was completed in 1922. By that time, the end of the Civil War in Russia had consolidated the Bolsheviks in power and had caused massive destruction to the country and its population. The “ruined civilisation” of Russia, he said in July 1922, had been the result of the Jews’ destructive influence and their absolute lack of constructive abilities²⁵¹. This was also an indication of the fate that awaited any other European country if it succumbed to communism - a theme he constantly reiterated in the 1930s and especially after the Spanish Civil War²⁵². Bolshevism, he argued in February 1925, was the new religion spreading from the east towards Europe like a “world pest”, aided by its spiritual supporter, namely Jewry²⁵³. This convergence of his central racial prejudice (anti-Semitism) and his fundamental ideological antithesis (anti-communism) upon Russia re-

²⁴⁸ Kuhn & Jäckel, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 207ff (October 1920)

²⁴⁹ Baynes, I, pp. 21ff; Phelps, p. 308 (speech to party organisation in Munich, 27 July 1920)

²⁵⁰ All ideas in Phelps, p. 308 (speech to party organisation in Munich, 27 July 1920), pp. 328-9 (speech in Munich 19 November 1920)

²⁵¹ Baynes, I, pp. 31-42 (speech in Munich, “Free State or Slavery”, 28 July 1922)

²⁵² Cf. Baynes, I, 665f (Proclamation to the German People, 1 February 1933); Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 730-2 (13 September 1937 at the Nuremberg Party Rally); I, 672ff (January 1937 to the *Reichstag*)

²⁵³ Hitler, A., *Die Rede Adolf Hitlers in der ersten grossen Massenversammlung (Münchener Bürgerbräu-Keller vom 27. Februar 1925) bei Wiederaufrichtung der National-Sozialistischen*

orientated his foreign policy programme against the Soviet Union with the cumulative vehemence of a metaphysical struggle. The elitist self-perception of National Socialism and Nazi Germany as the vanguard of the historic struggle against bolshevism and international Jewry for the protection of European civilisation established Russia as the symbolic alliance of all enemy forces to the German universal mission.

To this racial-ideological nucleus of anti-Russian sentiment Hitler added a historic dimension which linked the Teutonic and imperial past of the German “race” with its need for living space. In *Mein Kampf* he reiterated that the central tenet of the National Socialist foreign policy was the “securing of land and soil *rightfully belonging to the German Volk*”²⁵⁴. The historic living space of the German people lay not in the west or in the colonies, as the Wilhelminian *Weltpolitik* had erroneously assumed, but in the east, linking the route of the Teutonic knights with the triumph of Brest-Litovsk in 1917²⁵⁵. Again, racial considerations shaped his perception and analysis of German history. He argued that the creation of the vast Russian empire could not have been the work of the “inferior race” of the Slavs; it was rather the achievement of “Germanic organisers and rulers” who formed the basis of Muscovite Russia and established themselves as the intellectual and political elite of Russia throughout the centuries²⁵⁶. After, however, the 1917 Revolution, “a brutal dictatorship of foreign [Jewish] rule” had seized control of the country, destroying the constructive work of the Germanic race²⁵⁷. In attacking the Soviet state, therefore, Germany not only defended the west against the “poison” of bolshevism, but also marched again over the traces of history to rescue her past achievements and make constructive use of the space and resources which inferior and incompetent

Deutschen Arbeiter-Partei (Munich 1925), pp. 7-8. For an interesting analysis see Carr, W., . *A Study in Personality and Politics* (London 1978), pp. 114-26

²⁵⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 586ff (emphasis added). See also Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 35-43, for an analysis.

²⁵⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 586-609. For an analysis of these ideas see Stoakes, pp. 32f, 41ff

²⁵⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 587ff. Cf. Rosenberg’s ideas, whose influence upon Hitler in this respect has been widely acknowledged, in *Pest in Russland* (Munich 1922)

²⁵⁷ Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 728-32 (13 September 1937 at the Party Rally). Cf. I, 673f (September 1936 at the Party Rally)

racism had reduced to ruins²⁵⁸. Nazi foreign policy would pick up the thread left by the Holy Roman Empire and the Germanic crusaders, spreading towards the east and establishing what Hitler described as the "Germanic empire of the German nation"²⁵⁹.

In this sense, the concept of *Lebensraum* in Hitler's programme of spatial expansion performed an integrative and symbolic function similar to that of the *spazio vitale* in Mussolini's expansionist discourse. In the abstract sense of space for settlement it expressed demographic and economic arguments about the importance of territory for the progress of a nation. It also comprised a geopolitical nucleus, underscoring Germany's precarious geographical position in the centre of the European continent and emphasising the need for living space in order to stave off the danger of external attack²⁶⁰. However, the exact geographical focus of Nazi spatial expansion was defined by the combination of ideological, racial and historic factors. The universal mission of Nazi Germany as defender of European culture, the protection of the elite character of the German *Volk* and the historic legacy of the past converged upon the territories of the Soviet Union. By fusing the notion of historic irredentism with the anti-Semitic, anti-Slav and anti-communist traditions of the German radical right Hitler produced a symbolic justification for territorial expansion which could rally a wide variety of forces in interwar German society. He also succeeded in integrating the idiosyncratic anti-Bolshevik feelings and fears caused by the 1917 Russian revolution into the pre-existing *völkisch* prejudice against the Jews and the Slavs. In this way he added a sense of political urgency and contemporary relevance to Germany's historic drive towards Russia and brought previously abstract or passive racial feelings to the focus of popular nationalist sentiment²⁶¹.

²⁵⁸ In sequence: Baynes, I, pp. 665-8 (Proclamation to the German People, 1 February 1933); I, 791 (January 1932 to Industry Club at Düsseldorf); Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 642f (12 September 1936 at the Party Rally). Cf. *Mein Kampf*, pp. 598-607; *Zweites Buch*, pp. 102ff.

²⁵⁹ Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 732ff (13 September 1937 at the Party Rally) [excerpts of the speech are translated in Baynes, I, pp. 688-712]; pp. 903ff (September 1938, speech to the *Wehrmacht* soldiers). See also Rich, I, pp. 6-8.

²⁶⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 586-9.

²⁶¹ The importance of the anti-Bolshevik element in Nazi ideology is underlined in Nolte, E., *Das Europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917-1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Berlin 1987); Eley, G., "What Produces Fascism: Pre-industrial traditions or the crisis of the capitalist state?", *Politics*

If the integrative and figurative function of the ideology of living space was common in the two fascist regimes' expansionist policies, differences in the nature and importance of the various justifications should be neither discounted nor over-emphasised. The rigidity of the concept of race in Hitler's *Weltanschauung* cannot be compared either with Mussolini's endorsement of racism after 1936 or with Italian Fascism's emphasis on a hierarchy of cultures. Conversely, the element of historic irredentism was much more prominent in Mussolini's universalist project (based on the heritage of ancient and medieval Rome) than in the Hitlerite ideological-racial-historic notion of eastward expansion. The idea of *mare nostrum* and the claim to world power were much more akin to a nationalist utopia, if significantly more far-reaching in scope and radical in methods. Hitler's vision, by contrast, performed a significantly wider function of synthesis in the context of a much more fragmented nationalist agenda. It reconfigured the geographic priorities of German expansionism and purged it from remnants of previous currents (Wilhelminian policy, *border policy*, *Weltpolitik*)²⁶². It is important, however, to note that the Nazi ideology of living space owed its dynamism and appeal to the cumulative effect of *all* its constituent elements. Anti-Semitism *alone* cannot adequately explain Hitler's vision of eastern expansion - as Röhm put it, "the problem was the Jews, not the *eastern* Jews"²⁶³; nor can exclusive emphasis on anti-bolshevism or the legacy of Brest-Litovsk. Similarly, Mussolini's active pursuit of a Mediterranean empire cannot be understood as the sole consequence of the importance of historic irredentism in fascist ideology. Geopolitical and defence considerations played an important part in his decision-making, in the same way that his social Darwinist perception of history created the ideological momentum for active spatial expansion at the expense of other nations. Any attempt to over-determine the two regimes' ideology of living space as the primary outcome of a single factor discards the metaphorical and composite character of living space in fascist ideology, as the point where elitism,

and Society, 12 (1983), pp. 76-82; Birken, L., *Hitler as Philosophe. Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport Connecticut & London 1995), Ch. 5

²⁶² Knox, "Conquest", pp. 22-3, 57; *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 289ff; Aigner, pp. 261-6. Cf. Bosworth, R. J. B., "Italian foreign policy and its historiography", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Rizzo, G. (eds.), *Altro polo. Intellectuals and their Ideas in contemporary Italy* (Sydney 1983), pp. 52-96

²⁶³ Quoted in Rhodes, J. M., *The Hitler Movement* (Stanford 1980), pp. 43ff

constant struggle, demography, national security and world-power ambitions intersected.

V. Expansionist ideology in practice: the unity of thought and action in fascism

If the above visions of large-scale spatial expansion were derived from ideological convictions and aspirations which were not exclusive to fascist ideology, their prioritisation by the two fascist regimes owed its dynamism to a specifically *fascist* resolve to take them at face value and promote them in their totality through a constant activism²⁶⁴. In the worldviews of the Italian and German fascist movements, action was not simply the vehicle for the implementation of ideas and programmes. It was also an ideological goal in itself, the political externalisation of national virility, of the will to power and prominence. Like violence, which may be seen as an indispensable part of fascist activism, action was the necessary precondition for the spiritual mobilisation of the nation and the transition to the fascist “new order”. It was a lasting legacy of fascism’s revolutionary origins and a powerful weapon against normalisation and stagnation²⁶⁵. However, it was also a source of experience, processed by the fascist worldview to produce a more accurate account of national needs and interests. Expansion as action was indeed prescribed by fascist ideology, but it was clearly the *expression* of ideas as well as a generator of new options which *produced* ideas. The experience of the First World War fostered the fascist belief in the power of activism to reveal the inner qualities of the nation and a *leitmotif* for its future²⁶⁶. The consequent unity of thought and action in the fascist worldview was a reflection of the equal significance given to both elements as complementing each other in serving the long-term aspirations of the nation. It was also a sign of fascism’s determination not simply to mediate between the real and the utopian, but

²⁶⁴ See the analysis of the “fascist activist style of politics” in O’Sullivan, pp. 113-30; Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, p. 229-30

²⁶⁵ De Felice, R., *Interpretations of Fascism* (Cambridge Mass. & London 1977), pp. 11ff; Perfetti, F., *Il dibattito sul fascismo*, pp. 10ff

²⁶⁶ Scritti, II, 111 (“Ciò che rimane e ciò che verra”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 13 November 1920)

to use the latter *in toto* as the sole guiding principle for policy-making, unrestrained by other ideological beliefs and geared to uniting reality with vision.

In Italy, the short incubation period of the Fascist movement before 1922 resulted in a scarcity of policy statements on the part of its historic leadership²⁶⁷. Mussolini did not perceive this as a disadvantage for his party: his only programme was to govern and make Italy great again, both domestically and internationally²⁶⁸. He was also very emphatic in his rejection of the traditional notion of ideology as divorced from action²⁶⁹. Ideas, he said, had not saved Italy from decay²⁷⁰. The only remedy was a people with a will to power, with the strength to fight and exploit the superior inner qualities of the nation²⁷¹. Only the strength of will could “open the doors of power” and find solutions to every problem²⁷². In the Doctrine of Fascism Mussolini and Gentile described Fascism as both a *faith* and a doctrine in the making, an ideal with an evolving content realised through action and the laws of the omnipotent Fascist state²⁷³. Words and ideas were good and essential, he noted in 1925, but action was even more crucial²⁷⁴. At the same time, Fascism, as a renovative force and a *terza via*, was a movement which did not slavishly copy existing programmes and ideas of the past. Instead, it was a historic force that would *produce* a doctrine as a result of its activities²⁷⁵. Since old ideals had failed to restore the prestige of the Italian nation, Fascism would follow its own path, rejecting the limitations of existing principles and forging its ideological character according to the results of its activism. According to Pelizzi, Fascism based its historic success on

²⁶⁷ On the vague character of the Italian fascist ideology see Gregor, *Ideology of Fascism*, pp. 10-26

²⁶⁸ Scritti, II, 159 (speech in Bologna, 3 April 1921); 307-22 (“Discorso di Udine”, 20 September 1922), translated in Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (ed.), pp. 143ff

²⁶⁹ Incisa, L., “La rivolta dell’ordine”, *Terza Generazione*, 5 (1954), pp. 26-8, in Casucci (ed.), *Antologia*, pp. 508-14. Cf. Gentile, G., *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* (Rome 1929) - translated as “The Origins and Doctrine of Fascism”, in Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 303-4

²⁷⁰ Scritti, II, 315 (Discorso di Udine, 20 September 1922)

²⁷¹ OO, XXI, 426 (speech in the Scala of Milan, 28 October 1925); XXII, 128 (speech in Genoa, 23 May 1926); XXVI, 134 (“Il 1934”, 2 February 1934). See also Simonini, pp. 108-9

²⁷² OO, XXI, 426 (speech in the Scala of Milan, 28 October 1925); XXVI, 134, (“Il 1934”, 2 January 1934)

²⁷³ Mussolini, “Doctrine of Fascism”, pp. 165ff

²⁷⁴ Scritti, V, 67-70 (“Contro la massoneria”, speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 16 May 1925)

²⁷⁵ Rossi, C., “La critica alle critiche del fascismo”, *Gerarchia*, 4.1922; Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 330-42. Cf., however, U. Spirito’s conception of fascism as “absolute liberalism and socialism” in *Il corporativismo* (Florence 1970), pp. 371-9; Del Noce, A., *Il suicidio della rivoluzione* (Milan 1978), pp. 343ff

the conjunction between pure idealism and uncompromising action²⁷⁶. The latter element guaranteed the revolutionary character of the movement, eliminating the option of political compromise which had kept utopia divorced from reality for so long. Even if Fascist ideas were not particularly original in themselves, the determination of Fascism to pursue them in an absolute manner was indeed innovative²⁷⁷.

For Mussolini, the priority of serving the interests of the nation overshadowed all other ideological aspects of Fascist foreign policy. Since short-term interests were constantly changing in a very fluid international system, the *Duce* declared his determination to cut across ideological and political principles in order to achieve the most effective service to Italy²⁷⁸. In his conduct of foreign affairs he had always endeavoured to exorcise two main enemies: normality and any restriction on his freedom of action. Normality was the negation of the revolutionary spirit of transcendence, something inconceivable as long as the “old order” was still alive and resisting. As for freedom of action, he fought stubbornly, even after the outbreak of the Second World War, to retain his regime’s political autonomy, to keep all his options open and to avoid hasty commitments. He often declared his willingness “to swim against the stream”²⁷⁹, following an equivocal policy towards allies and enemies, ideologies and principles. Ideals possessed an ultimate value only with reference to the achievement of long-term visions. In the short term, political flexibility and uncompromising action were not regarded by the Fascist leadership as weakness, but rather as a *sine qua non* in the revolutionary fight against predictability and stagnation²⁸⁰. Since 1918 Mussolini had made clear his determination not to be impeded by “forbidden” goals or means but to bring the vision of a world-power Italy to its logical, consummate conclusion²⁸¹.

²⁷⁶ Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 335-42

²⁷⁷ Pelizzi, C., “Idealismo e fascismo”, *Gerarchia*, 10.1922. See also Gentile, G., *Origini e dottrina del fascismo*; Gentile, E., *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 395-6; Papini, G., “A Nationalist Programme”, in Lyttelton (ed.), *Italian Fascisms*, p. 100; Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine”, pp. 170f

²⁷⁸ Scritti, II, 152 (“Dopo due anni”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 23 March 1921)

²⁷⁹ Scritti, II, 53 (“Navigare Necesse”, *Popolo d’Italia*, 1 January 1920)

²⁸⁰ Gentile, G., “The Philosophical Basis of Fascism”, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 (1928), pp. 300-1; OO, XXI (“Intransigenza assoluta”, 22 June 1928)

²⁸¹ Scritti, I, 326f (“Ossare!”, in *Popolo d’Italia*, 13 June 1918)

Hitler and the Nazi leadership did not go to such lengths in their deification of short-term activism. Unlike his Italian counterpart, the *Führer* had a long time at his disposal to study the experience of the past and reach a number of conclusions about how to achieve his goals more effectively than his predecessors. In his speeches, he presented the policies of his regime as stemming from a fairly concrete programme of priorities, which he had formulated before the assumption of power²⁸². The unity between thought and action was the logical outcome of the ideologically conditioned emphasis on action as an expression of fascism's superior qualities and dynamism. Hitler held a general idea of his *long-term* aspirations (expansion in the east, a racially reconstructed Europe). He also formulated some guidelines for the achievement of his vision: for example, his instinctive perception of Britain and Italy as indispensable allies²⁸³. Having said that, the *Führer* did not possess a blueprint for *short-term* action. In the conduct of foreign affairs, Hitler was very short on the detail of how he would achieve his grand long-term goals. He combined his belief in activism with a confidence in his political intuition, perceiving himself as a "prophet" and gambler²⁸⁴ with a strength originating from the transcendental belief in his visions and the importance of action. He was systematic enough in his domestic preparation (i.e. rearmament, introduction of conscription), and lucky enough in his timing to reap benefits which fostered confidence in his own instinct and judgement. Like Mussolini, Hitler declared his determination to fight for the salvation of his nation in defiance of any ideological principle²⁸⁵. Only action could provide the necessary expression of the ideological superiority of the regime and the nation. The inner qualities of the *Volk* would be revealed and become meaningful only through their externalisation. He also emphasised that the distinction between feasible and unfeasible national goals was nonsensical. In 1942 he spoke to his Minister of Munitions Speer about his aversion to the word "impossible". For him, the will to succeed, to act and provide solutions was the only formula for eventual success²⁸⁶. In

²⁸² See, for example, Hitler's speech on 10-2-1939, quoted in Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volkgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 224f

²⁸³ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 554-85; Maser, pp. 141-51

²⁸⁴ See the relevant references in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1933-44 (esp. pp. 1337f) [speech to party members, 8 November 1942]

²⁸⁵ Baynes, II, p. 1136 (speech in Kiel, 6 November 1933)

²⁸⁶ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Ch. 17; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 842

this sense, the unity of ideas and action in Nazism becomes comparable to the Italian case in its dialectic nature. Action was the sharp edge of the fascist worldview and functioned as a force bridging the gap between reality and vision. It was the political and ethical vehicle for transforming the inauspicious present into a new reality that *could* realise the long-term aspects of the fascist “new order”.

VI: Conclusions

In this chapter we formulated a common “minimum” for the ideologies of the Italian and German fascist regimes which underpinned their inclination towards territorial expansion. This minimum projected expansion as a necessity for, and a right of, the two countries in three different, yet complementary ways. Expansion was a *national* necessity, pursuing the vision of a complete national unification and aspiring to create a homogeneous state which would encompass all ethnically kin peoples and their territories. It was a *natural* necessity in the context of the eternal struggle among nations, promising a fairer ratio of people to land by incorporating other areas, suitable for agricultural exploitation and resettlement, into the national territory. Finally, and by far most importantly, it was a *historic* necessity, derived from the alleged superiority of the two peoples and their destiny as creators and defenders of European civilisation. Beyond this nucleus of comparable ideological attributes each regime formulated its expansionist ideology and programme in accordance with national traditions and interests, fusing pre-existing ideological trends and the different experience of the First World War into a new synthesis with a significantly more pronounced propensity for activism.

In this sense, the ideology of the two regimes combined a generic, *abstract* penchant for expansion with a more *specific* vision, scope and method for territorial aggrandisement. The abstract, generic justification prescribed a notion of expansion which was open-ended, dynamic and constant, without concrete short-term foci or binding priorities. What gave each regime’s expansionist ideology a programmatic long-term character was to be found in a second level of justification, which comprised historic, ideological and geopolitical arguments. Predictably, at this point

the two regimes diverged. The Italian regime pursued a Mediterranean policy of expansion, while the German regime opted for a massive programme of *Lebensraum* acquisition in the east, in tandem with a crusade against bolshevism and the Jews. The significantly more brutal and destructive tendencies of Nazism fed from the biological rigidity of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*, from the objectification of irrational beliefs through science, from a fundamentalist vision of cultural and biological uniformity. Such beliefs had more shallow roots in Italian society which, according to Mussolini's own admission, was the most individualistic in the world and resisted rigid definitions of its character and duties²⁸⁷. All the above similarities and divergences were reflected in each regime's definition of *living space*, which became a pivotal tenet not simply of fascist expansionism but of fascist ideology itself. The idea of living space developed into a figurative and composite expression of both generic fascist ideas and distinct national aspirations. It was an essentially tautological concept, being at the same time the prize for fascism's obsession with activism and the means for attaining concrete historic, geopolitical and ideological ambitions. In this respect, the historiographical distinction between "expansion without object" and "programmatic expansion" is methodologically erroneous as it disregards the above dual character of space in fascist ideology²⁸⁸.

Both leaders repeated the themes of constant struggle, elitism and living space with a consistency throughout the life span of their regimes which should not be dismissed *a priori* as mere propaganda or bluff. They also declared their determination to unite utopia with reality by matching deeds with words and results with aspirations. Their position as charismatic leaders of the two movements established them as the living incarnation and ultimate expression of the fascist worldview. The transition of the movements to organised parties and finally to power necessitated the systematisation and clarification of those initial ideas which had informed the activities and aspirations of the two movements. The task of the two leaders was indeed formidable. They had to rally the disparate forces within their parties to a political programme of action which would combine and harmonise

²⁸⁷ Scritti, II, 104-5 (speech in Trieste, 20 September 1920)

²⁸⁸ This is discussed in Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, Ch. 6; Vigezzi, B., *Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dall'unità ai giorni nostri. Orientamenti degli studi e prospettiva della ricerca* (Milan 1991), pp. 98ff

different views about the priorities and goals of fascism. Once in power, they had to translate fascist values into action and convince their fellow travellers that their decisions expressed the spirit of fascist ideology accurately and effectively. They also had to link expansionist policies with the wider fascist desire for a radical transformation of human life in all its expressions. The above ideological “minimum” represented a consensus within the two movements as to the long-term priorities and character of foreign policy-making. However, different views amongst fascist leading figures about the best way to achieve these goals persisted and remained in a dialectical relation with the leaders’ own interpretations. At the same time, once in power, the two leaders became aware of the immense gap between what they perceived as “ideal” conditions for accomplishing their visions and the existing internal and international situation. These remarks bring us back to something mentioned earlier: that ideology produces predispositions, tendencies, options and priorities, but *does not determine* policy-making. Action is also defined by domestic circumstances and limitations, by the struggle of domestic institutions and individuals to shape policy according to their own perceptions, by the interaction between states. Fascism did not become an ideological and political *fait accompli* because it did not expand in a vacuum. Rather, its nature and policies were shaped in constant interaction with, and in opposition to, other strong forces, domestic and international. The following chapters explore the impact of these opposing factors upon fascist policies and analyse the complex process through which fascist ideals struggled, but never managed, to attain their unity with action in reality.

CHAPTER 3

Towards a "fascist state": fascist leaders, traditional groups, fascist parties and foreign policy decision-making

I: Introduction

The appointment of Mussolini and Hitler as heads of coalition governments in 1922 and 1933 respectively constituted a decisive development in the process of fusion in the Italian and German Right. In the previous chapter we examined how such an osmosis took place on the *ideological* level, allowing fascism to emerge as an effective synthesis of traditional aspirations and a new sense of radicalism and activism. This process led to a gradual convergence between old and new Right upon a set of short-term goals for both domestic and foreign policy. In Italy this had been manifested in the rallying dynamism of the *intervento* movement of 1914-15, but was strengthened through the inclusion of Fascists in the electoral lists of 1921. In Germany, the campaign against the Young Plan in 1929 produced a coalition between Hugenberg and Hitler which appeared to originate from agreement on a single issue (reparations-revisionism) but initiated a debate about the political role of Hitler and the NSDAP in the German Right. Although the implications of these developments did not become immediately apparent, a process of *political* fusion was set in motion which gradually legitimised Nazism as an alternative solution to the political crisis¹.

¹ Eley, G., "Conservatives and Radical Nationalists in Germany: the production of fascist potentials, 1912-1928", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives. The Radical Right and the Establishment in the twentieth century Europe* (London 1990), pp. 50-70

In this respect, the endorsement of the "fascist solution" in 1922 and 1933 by the élite groups in the two societies, albeit neither predetermined nor inevitable², was the conclusion of a calculated political rationale. The aim was to transform the political representation of the Right by harnessing the powerful appeal of fascism and injecting its dynamism into the existing institutional framework of the state. This decision, however, instigated a new phase in the process of fusion, which this time involved the balance between traditional ruling groups and the fascist élites in the decision-making process. Agreement on a common agenda of short-term goals meant that the utilisation of Mussolini and Hitler was intended to remain confined within the framework of a "caesarist" regime, in which the autonomy of the traditional groups would be enhanced and legitimised by the charisma of the two fascist leaders³. Institutional rearrangements were not ruled out, but the emphatic separation of the two leaders from their more "extreme" parties was aimed to reduce the ability of the former to intervene in the institutional debate with radical proposals and initiatives⁴. Such a calculation did seem logical, given that the number of fascist representatives in the two cabinets was initially very small (four in Italy; three in Germany), and the two Heads of State (the King Vittorio Emanuele III; President Hindenburg) possessed the constitutional prerogative to dispense with the fascist leaders at any time. However, by admitting the fascist leaders to power, the élite groups in Italy and Germany allowed fascism a significantly larger stake in the institutional debate over the form of decision-making. Despite converging on ideological and political objectives, fascist and non-fascist élites held fundamentally different views on how to achieve these goals - in other words, on how the state should be reorganised and what roles should be allocated to the different partners.

The historiographical debate about the character of the state which eventually emerged from this institutional fusion has produced bitter controversies. The extent

² Lyttelton, A., *The Seizure of Power. Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (London 1987, 2nd ed.); Bracher, K. D., *The German Dictatorship* (London 1970); Allen, W. S., "The Nazi Rise to Power: A Comprehensive Catastrophe", in Maier, C. S., Hoffmann, S., Gould, A. (ed.), *The Rise of the Nazi Regime. Historical Reassessments* (Boulder & London, 1986), pp. 9-18

³ For Germany see Hildebrand, K., *The Third Reich* (London 1984), pp. 144-7; Hiden, J., Farquharson, J., *Explaining Hitler's Germany* (Totowa, New Jersey 1983), pp. 157-8. For Italy see Mack Smith, D., *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven & London 1989), pp. 253-4; Gallo, pp. 165-6

⁴ Koch, H. W., "1933: The Legality of Hitler's Assumption of Power", in Koch (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 53-4

to which the development and structure of the two fascist systems reflected the intentions of the fascist leaders or resulted from the uncontrolled dynamism of the struggle between fascist and non-fascist élites or between fascist leaderships and fascist parties, remains open to discussion. Similar questions have been raised with regard to the actual political power of the two fascist leaders in the decision-making process, their capacity to shape or influence developments, their ability to contain the radicalism of the party. It is difficult to give definitive answers to these questions for the whole fascist period, given that fascist consolidation was not a one-way, calculated process with a foregone conclusion. Instead, the institutional form of the "fascist" system was the outcome of three major factors. The first was the struggle between the new fascist élites and the traditional political, economic, military and bureaucratic groups. The second was the complex relationship between the fascist leaders and the fascist parties. The third was the clash between the diachronic features of the Italian and German domestic systems, and the desire of the fascist élites to implement new patterns of organisation that had little relevance to the existing ones. Each of the two regimes responded differently to the challenge of constructing a fascist state, giving dissimilar solutions to the above three problems. In this sense, instead of speaking of the *establishment* of a "fascist" state in Italy and Germany⁵, it would be more accurate to talk of a compromise between fascist concepts of "state" and the resistance of traditional, long-term features of the two systems.

The importance of this institutional debate was central to the foreign policy decision-making process. Apart from whatever intentions and "programmes" the two fascist leaderships possessed, the implementation of a foreign policy plan depended heavily on both the acquiescence of the political, military and economic groups and on the capacity of the material infrastructure to produce optimal conditions for the attainment of the pursued goals. At the same time, the political tension between the fascist leaderships and their parties was anything but minimised after the inclusion of

⁵ Ungari, P., "Ideologie giuridiche e strategie istituzionali del fascismo", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M., (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 45-56; Neumann, F., *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (New York 1963), pp. 467ff; Caplan, J., *Government without Administration. State and Civil Service in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Oxford 1988), pp. 321-81 (esp. pp. 331-2), and "National Socialism and the Theory of the State", in Childers, T., Caplan, J. (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York & London 1993), pp. 98-102

the former and the exclusion of the latter from power-sharing. This was of great importance, since the parties sponsored more radical approaches to both domestic and foreign policy issues, perceiving themselves as institutional alternatives to the existing states.

This chapter aims to examine the progress of this twofold institutional struggle from the period of the *Machtübernahme* until the outbreak of the Second World War⁶. It assesses the changing influence of the various traditional élite groups (military, political, diplomatic), of the fascist leaderships and the fascist parties in the foreign policy decision-making process. It focuses on key-decisions of the two regimes and highlights the role of each of the above agents in the formulation of foreign policy. The chapter first discusses how the "*minimum consensus*" that the traditional élites granted to the fascist experiment lay down the foundations for a leader-oriented system but also initiated a fierce institutional battle between these élites, the fascist leaderships and their parties. The ensuing consolidation of fascist power is analysed on two levels - first, with regard to the declining influence of the traditional groups and, second, with regard to the marginalisation of the fascist party as originator of foreign policy. The analysis highlights the central role of the two fascist leaders in the decision-making process, a role which was established through the relegation of traditional élites to a *functional* position in the decision-making process, and the curbing of the policy-making capacity of the fascist parties. However, the fascist systems that were developed in Italy and Germany were not simply the products of what the two leaderships might have perceived as the optimal state. Instead, they bore the marks of an institutional struggle between an *authoritarian* concept of state (based on the logic of "minimum consensus" and the idea of a "caesarist" state held by the traditional groups) and *totalitarianism* (as sponsored by the fascist parties) which pressed for a revolutionary transformation of state structures and a clear break with past foreign policy programmes⁷. The leader-

⁶ Kettenacker, L., "Social and Psychological Aspects of the Führer's Role", in Koch (ed.), pp. 98-132

⁷ Pombeni, P., "La forma partito del fascismo e del nazismo", in Bracher, K. D., Valiani, L. (eds.), *Fascismo e nazionalsocialismo* (Bologna 1986), pp. 219-64; *Demagogia e tirannide. Uno studio sulla forma-partito del fascismo* (Bologna 1984), pp. 237-90. As in the previous chapter, the term is used to denote the aspirations for "total" control and integration of social life under the auspices of a hyper-party organisation with power of collective decision-making (as opposed to the authoritarian, leader-based model with the party as ancillary organisation).

oriented character of the two systems was further enhanced as each of the above groups sought a mandate and legitimacy from the leader in defending its autonomy against intrusions from the others. Yet, the institutional tension was never resolved in a decisive and definite way. In this sense, the consolidation of the two leaders' position in the fascist systems was not the inevitable consequence of any fascist theory of state or the outcome of the personal intentions of the leaders, but the end-result of a long-term structural struggle in the essentially polycratic framework of decision-making.

II. The concept of "minimum consensus"

The concept of "minimum consensus", i.e. the support on the part of military, economic and political leading circles for certain domestic and international measures pronounced by the two fascist leaderships, in practice deprived the fascist acquisition of power in 1922 and 1933 of its revolutionary pretensions. Acquisition of power represented the successful revolution of the fascist movements, but also a revolution that took place in relative harmony with the interests and aspirations of the main actors of the *anciens régimes*⁸. This idiosyncratic blending of *revolution with consent* produced a complex dualism at the heart of the fascist regimes⁹. On the one hand, the fascist revolution aspired to a dramatic break with the previous domestic and foreign policies, both in style and in objectives. On the other hand, however, the conditions which facilitated the legal seizure of power resulted in a complicated form of power-sharing between fascist leaderships and traditional élite groups. This meant that fascism possessed limited institutional freedom to proceed unilaterally with the implementation of its own concept of state or its wide expansionist plans¹⁰. In Italy,

⁸ Mommsen, H., "National Socialism: Continuity and Change", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 151-192 (here pp. 166f); Kettenacker, L., "The German View", in Douglas, R. (ed.), *1939. A Retrospect Forty Years After* (London 1983), pp. 25-6; Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, pp. 15-41

⁹ Payne, S. G., *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison 1980), p. 75; Kogan, N., "Fascism as a Political System", in Woolf (ed.), *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 11-18

¹⁰ On the background of the fascist seizure of power and the problems it presented for the new fascist leaderships, see, for Germany, Carr, *Hitler*, pp. 28ff. And, for Italy, Lyttelton, *Seizure*, pp. 77-93;

Mussolini had to accept the institutional tutelage of the Crown, co-existence with the traditional military and diplomatic bureaucracies whose primary loyalty was to the House of Savoy, and the limitation of the party's influence upon the state machinery¹¹. In Germany, Hitler faced similar political challenges: the dominant constitutional role of President Hindenburg under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution¹², the latter's insistence on keeping the military and diplomatic functions of the state under his supervision¹³, and the need to restrain the revolutionary or subversive activities of the Nazi party when these were directed against the institutional authority of the state¹⁴.

This situation presented the fascist leaderships in Italy and Germany with a similar problem: how to show moderation towards the traditional élites while appeasing the craving of the fascist parties for a more central political function and influence on policy-making. From the viewpoint of the various traditional élite groups the party constituted the unacceptable face of fascism. For them, the appeal of

Repaci, A., *La marcia su Roma* (Rome 1963), 2 vols.; Vivarelli, R., *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l'avvento del fascismo (1918-1922)* (Naples 1967), 2 vols.; Lyttelton, "Italian Fascism", in Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 88-99

¹¹ On a general survey of the limitations to Mussolini's power see Knox, M., "Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 1-57. See also Germino, D., *The Italian Fascist Party in Power. A Study of Totalitarian Rule* (Minneapolis 1959), pp. 10ff; Aquarone, A., *L'organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin 1965), pp. 291ff; Brooker, P., *The Faces of Fraternalism. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan* (Oxford 1991), pp. 153ff; Tannenbaum, E. R., *Fascism in Italy: Society and Culture 1922-1945* (London 1973), pp. 72f; Gentile, G., "The Problem of the Party in Italian Fascism", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), pp. 251-74; Thompson, D., *State Control in Fascist Italy. Culture and Conformity 1925-43* (Manchester & New York 1991), pp. 79-82

¹² On Article 48 see Boldt, H., "Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. Its historical and political implications", in Nicholls, A., Matthias, E. (eds.), *German Democracy and the Triumph of Hitler* (London 1971), pp. 79-98. See also Heiber, H., *Die Republik von Weimar* (Munich 1966), pp. 225f; Koch, H. W., *A Constitutional History of Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London & New York 1984), pp. 266-70

¹³ Seraphin, H. G., *Das Politische Tagesbuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/5 und 1939/40* (Göttingen/Berlin/Frankfurt 1956), p. 20. On Hitler's mistrust of the Foreign Office and the conservative diplomats related to Hindenburg see Carr, W., *Arms, Autarky and Aggression. A Study in German Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (London 1972), pp. 27f. On Hindenburg's support for von Neurath from 1932 onwards see Heineman, J. L., *Hitler's First Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1979), pp. 44ff

¹⁴ On the history of the Nazi party see Orlow, D., *The History of the Nazi Party 1933-1945* (Newton Abbot 1969-1973), 2 vols.; Kater, M., *The Nazi Party. A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-45* (Oxford 1983); Unger, A. L., *The Totalitarian Party. Party and People in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia* (London 1974). On the issue of party-state relations see Noakes, J., Pridham G., *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. II: *State, Economy, and Society 1933-1939* (Exeter 1984), pp. 233-58; Broszat, M., *The Hitler State. The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London & New York 1981), pp. 199ff; Brooker, pp. 93ff

the "fascist solution" adopted in 1922 and 1933 resulted exactly from the clear separation of the fascist parties from their leaders, who were regarded by the dominant groups as a moderating force within the two movements¹⁵. The two leaders' ability to exercise full control over their parties was unquestioned, and their mirage of moderation could very easily be interpreted as the prelude to a long-term trend towards political normalisation which could in turn be imposed upon the more radical fascist movements. In Italy, the *Confindustria* (*Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana*, General Confederation of Italian Industry) had made clear in 1922 that the appointment of Mussolini would not be opposed by industrial interests¹⁶. Nationalist pro-monarchical figures of the Italian Nationalist Association did their best to persuade the King that the *Duce* was the only available solution, and one that would not upset the position of the traditional élite groups if combined with the political isolation of the PNF. The leadership of the armed forces, represented by General Diaz, made it clear that martial law was much less desirable than a Mussolini coalition cabinet¹⁷. Fear of civil war or uncontrolled Fascist violence neutralised the last traces of opposition to the "fascist solution". On a regional level, local political and military authorities openly defied orders from the central government to suppress Fascist mobilisation¹⁸. Even liberal politicians, including Giolitti, attempted to lure Mussolini into a wider liberal-Fascist cabinet¹⁹.

¹⁵ Andreski, S., "Fascists as Moderates", in Larsen, S. U., Hagtvet, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1980), pp. 52-5; Faye, pp. 407ff. See also the analysis of Faye's arguments in Thompson, J. B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, pp. 211-27

¹⁶ Zamagni, V., *The Economic History of Italy, 1860-1990* (Oxford 1993), pp. 241f; Sarti, *Industrial Leadership*, pp. 33-7. On the subsidies to the PNF from industrialists see Procacci, G., "Appunti in tema di crisi dello stato liberale e di origini del fascismo", *Studi Storici*, 6 (1965), pp. 221-37; Sarti, *Industrial Leadership*, pp. 36f; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. 1: *La conquista del potere (1921-25)* (Turin 1966), pp. 327ff. See also the distrust of leading figures of the *Confindustria* towards fascism, in Melograni, P., "Confindustria e fascismo tra il 1919 e 1925", *Il Nuovo Osservatore*, 6 (1965), pp. 834-73; *ibid.*, *Gli industriali e Mussolini: Rapporti tra Confindustria e fascismo dal 1919 al 1929* (Milan 1972), pp. 9ff. Note, however, the declaration of support for the "fascist solution" [Clough, S., *The Economic History of Italy* (New York & London 1964), p. 216]

¹⁷ Rochat, G., *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini (1919-1925)* (Bari 1967), pp. 397-408; Clark, p. 221; Lyttelton, *Seizure*, pp. 91-3; Eatwell, R., *Fascism: A History* (London 1995), pp. 46-7

¹⁸ Lyttelton, *Seizure*, pp. 39-41; De Grand, "Bolshevik and Fascist Attacks", pp. 141-3

¹⁹ Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, pp. 247-8

In Germany, a long list of industrialists provided much needed financial support to the NSDAP, albeit not on a very large scale. This did not mean that they were committed to the Nazi solution, as at the same time they were subsidising other right-wing parties²⁰, but it signified an acceptance of the political utility of Hitler and his entourage²¹. If many conservative *Reichswehr* figures were appalled by the plebeian *Führer*, a younger generation of military officials around von Schleicher did not hesitate to gamble with the Nazi leadership²². Others went even further: the then Army Commander in East Prussia von Blomberg had already revealed his preference for the *Führer* compared to any other realistic alternative²³. For their part, a number of conservative politicians, including the Foreign Minister von Neurath, preferred to see Hitler as Chancellor of a coalition government than a repetition of the von Schleicher or von Papen scenarios²⁴. Personal antipathy between the von Schleicher and von Papen groups was running high, thus ruling out a repetition of either of the two short-lived 1932 cabinets²⁵. Even more important, however, von Papen was so eager to succeed in forming a government without Schleicher that he surrendered to Hitler's demand for the position of Chancellor²⁶.

If now leaders and members of the two parties celebrated the seizure of power as the first step towards the fascist "revolution" and the "fascistisation" of the state, the "minimum consensus" programme was intended to remove this very possibility while strengthening the crumbling legitimacy of the state. Mussolini's and

²⁰ Geary, "Industrial Elite", pp. 88ff; Turner, "Big Business and the Rise of Hitler", pp. 95f; *ibid.*, *German Big Business*, pp. 142ff, 253-71

²¹ Turner, *Faschismus und Kapitalismus*, pp. 92f; Manvell, Fraenkel, *Hundred Days*, pp. 215-7

²² Broszat, *Collapse*, pp. 146f; Carsten, F. L., *The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933* (Oxford 1966), pp. 296ff, 364ff

²³ Rosinski, H., *The German Army* (New York 1966), Chs. 5-6; Carsten, pp. 389-90

²⁴ Heineman, J. L., *Hitler's First Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1979), pp. 63f; Schöllgen, G., *A Conservative against Hitler. Ulrich von Hassell: Diplomat in Imperial Germany, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, 1881-1944* (Basingstoke & London 1991), pp. 44-6; Eley, G., "Conservatives and Radical Nationalists in Germany: the production of fascist potentials, 1912-1928", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives* (London 1990), pp. 50-70

²⁵ Abraham, D., "The Collapse of Weimar", in Maier, C. S., Hoffmann, S. Gould, A. (eds.), *The Rise of the Nazi Regime. Historical Reassessments* (London 1986), pp. 6-8; Heineman, pp. 60f; Vogelsang, *Reichswehr*, p. 386. Even the armed forces were no longer favourably disposed to von Schleicher [Geyer, "Etudes", pp. 113ff]

²⁶ On von Papen's intrigues during January 1933 see Bracher, pp. 624ff; Wheeler-Bennett, *Hindenburg*, pp. 432ff

Hitler's charismatic leadership would form the basis of an *authoritarian caesarist* regime which would transform decision-making procedures and strengthen the jurisdiction of each traditional group in its own sphere of responsibility. The new state would fulfil a long-standing claim of conservative forces, namely to remove the burden of political accountability to democratic institutions and public approval. Experienced politicians, such as Sonnino and von Neurath, welcomed the gradual removal of liberal forms of accountability after the fascist acquisition of power²⁷. Internal reform of the state along authoritarian lines was based on the principle that the traditional groups would use their institutional autonomy to reassert their *total responsibility* for political and practical decisions in their respective fields²⁸. In other words, policy would originate with the relevant expert groups and would be sanctioned by the charismatic leader as a symbol of plebiscitary approval.

This form of institutional fusion was, of course, compatible neither with the fascist leaders' ambitions for absolute power nor with the two fascist parties' plans for conquering the state and organising society in a totalitarian pattern. Consequently, from the first days of the Mussolini and Hitler cabinets the foundations of a fierce political and institutional struggle were laid down. What was essentially at stake was the balance of power among the three contenders within the state and their respective share of influence on the decision-making process. What was not apparent to the traditional ruling groups when the "fascist solution" was decided was that the appointment of Mussolini and Hitler increased, rather than curtailed, the influence of fascism upon the institutional debate over reform of

²⁷ For Sonnino's call for a "return to the Statuto" see Sonnino, S., *Diario, 1866-1912* (Bari 1972), vol. 1, p. 356; Sarti, R., "Italian Fascism: radical politics and conservative goals", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives. The radical right and the establishment in the twentieth century Europe* (London 1990), pp. 19f. For Neurath's aversion to the parliamentary system see Rauschning, H., *Men of Chaos* (New York 1942), p. 172

²⁸ Weisbrod, B., "The crisis of bourgeois society in Interwar Germany", in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 27ff; Blackbourn, D., "The German Bourgeoisie", in Blackbourn, D., Evans, R. J. (eds.), *The German Bourgeoisie: essays on the social history of the German middle class from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century* (London 1993, 2nd ed.), pp. 1-45; Kettenacker, L., "Social and Psychological Aspects of the Führer's Rule", in Koch (ed.), pp. 96-132 (here pp. 107-8); Geiger, T., *Die soziale Schichtung des deutschen Volkes. Soziographischer Versuch auf statistischer Grundlage* (Stuttgart 1932), pp. 77f; Geyer, "Traditional Elites and National Socialism Leadership", in Maier, C. S., Hoffmann, S. Gould, A. (eds.), *The Rise of the Nazi Regime. Historical Reassessments* (London 1986), p. 61. For Italy see Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, p. 106; Clough, p. 216

government. It produced a polycratic system in which rival conceptions of state and policy-making were bound to clash with totally unpredictable consequences.

With hindsight, the arrogant confidence of the traditional groups in the safeguards of "minimum consensus" against fascist consolidation seems absurdly misplaced. The failure to control fascism was manifested in the declining influence of the traditional élites on the decision-making process: from total responsibility to co-decision, loss of political influence and, finally, relegation to a functional role with insignificant powers of intervention. However, this trend was expressed differently in each country. The initial institutional form of the state, the different traditional standing of the diverse groups, their varying ability to resist "fascistisation" and, not least, different perceptions about the party's function in a fascist system greatly affected the form of fascist consolidation in each country. Even Mussolini and Hitler appeared to hold diverse views about the optimal mechanism of decision-making, influenced by long-term features of the state they inherited in 1922 and 1933 respectively. It is, therefore, essential to examine the process of institutional rearrangement in each country separately, first with regard to the role of the various non-fascist élite groups and, second, with regard to the function of the PNF and the NSDAP in the fascist systems.

III. Foreign policy decision-making, fascist leaderships and traditional élites: the emergence of a leader-oriented system

Italy: an authoritative, etatist model

Long-term features of the system and Mussolini's early foreign policy (1922-1924)

In Italy, the foundation of the modern Italian state reproduced the main constitutional framework of the Kingdom of Sardinia, preserving the predominance of Piedmontese bureaucracies in the post-unification institutions. The House of

Savoy retained its constitutional prerogatives, namely the supreme command of the armed forces and a special relation with the traditional diplomatic group. Such institutional links perpetuated a tradition of primary allegiance of diplomatic and military élites to the Crown. The links, however, became increasingly weaker as liberal reforms of the state promoted the bureaucratisation of these groups and curtailed the political influence of the King upon policy-making. The initial intervening power of the Crown in key-appointments gradually waned, as did the monopoly of influential positions by the Piedmontese élite. Especially during the Giolittian period, the dynastic loyalty of diplomats and military officials became a feature of formal, rather than political, significance²⁹. This resulted in a slight erosion of the aristocratic character of these groups as their transformation into "national" institutions dictated their opening to other groups within the Italian society. Although the influx of members from different social (bourgeoisie) and geographic (central and south Italy) groups was not dramatic, it did re-proportion the share of the Piedmontese aristocracy and its political influence³⁰.

The institutional links, however, between the monarchy and the diplomatic-military élites were never severed, insulating them from bureaucratic reform which took place after the turn of the century in the context of a general effort to modernise the Italian system³¹. This had a debilitating effect upon the effectiveness of the armed forces which was painfully manifested in their performance in the First World War. Although the trauma of the defeat at Caporetto instigated a process of limited internal reform and change of leadership in the armed forces, there was no attempt to reassess the structure of the armed forces or to enhance their wounded prestige³². Their weakening link with the House of Savoy and loss of their aristocratic character affected their social standing negatively³³. Unlike the armies of most other European

²⁹ Orsini, F. G., "La diplomazia", in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. C. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 278-9; Serra, E., "La burocrazia della politica estera italiana", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S. (eds.), *La politica estera italiana (1860-1985)* (Bologna 1991), pp. 68-72

³⁰ Bosworth, pp. 29ff; Orsini, pp. 282-5

³¹ Serra, "Burocrazia", pp. 78-81

³² Rochat, G., *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini (1919-1925)* (Bari 1967), pp. 67-119

³³ For the low social status of the army in Italy see Whittam, J., *The Politics of the Italian Army, 1861-1918* (London 1977). See also Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, Ch. 3

powers, the *Regio Esercito* was not regarded as a channel to an attractive professional career. It remained a minor actor in foreign policy decision-making, geared to peacetime functions of guaranteeing public order and security³⁴. It was deprived of major political influence on key-decisions of Liberal Italy, including the Libyan campaign of 1912 and the decision to enter the war in 1915³⁵. After the end of hostilities, pressure for fundamental reforms was stubbornly resisted by traditional hierarchies within the armed forces, on the basis of their institutional autonomy from public scrutiny³⁶.

Italian diplomacy, on the other hand, retained a similar institutional dualism (a state bureaucracy with traditional links to the Crown) but was more firmly integrated into the foreign policy decision-making mechanism of the state. Although the Foreign Ministry was less immune to attempts at administrative reform, the composition of its officials and its traditional structure were not seriously altered until the end of the First World War, in spite of changes introduced after the fall of Crispi in 1896 and, later, during the Giolittian period³⁷. Again, the relation of the diplomatic corps with the monarchy became more formal and symbolic, but public perceptions of diplomacy as an elitist body, bound to the traditional foreign policy objectives of the House of Savoy, became more widespread. After the war, the handling of peace negotiations exposed Italian diplomacy to criticism from both the moderate left and the "new" nationalist right. Reformist socialists, like L. Bissolati, renounced previous territorial claims (hence, their castigation as *rinunciatori*) in favour of lasting peace and international reconciliation, and criticised Italian governments for their expansionist, confrontational foreign policy³⁸. The latter, including the ANI (*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, Italian Nationalist Association), D'Annunzio and gradually Mussolini, demanded a more ambitious

³⁴ Rochat, G., "L' esercito e fascismo", in Quazza, G. (ed.), *Fascismo e società italiana* (Turin 1973), pp. 89-123

³⁵ Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (London 1983), pp. 42ff

³⁶ Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 202ff; Rochat, G., "Mussolini e le forze armate", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 113-7; Rochat, *Esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, pp. 67-119; 397-408; Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 69f

³⁷ Serra, E., *La diplomazia in Italia* (Milan 1984), pp. 28-40

³⁸ Saladino, S., "Italy", in Rogger, H., Weber, E. (eds.), *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (London 1965), pp. 209-58

foreign policy along the lines of a great power rhetoric, and unleashed their frustration after 1918 at the handling of the peace negotiations and especially the loss of Fiume. For them, the moderate gains at Versailles revealed the ineffective, antiquated character of Italian diplomacy and underlined the need for modernisation, i.e. becoming more accessible to new social groups in Italian society. This call was mainly intended to strengthen the representation of the "new", radical trend of nationalism at the expense of the aristocratic, elitist tradition of the diplomatic corps³⁹. However, they also attacked the *rinunciatori* of the left: the first punitive expedition of the *Fasci* against socialists (January 1919) targeted Bissolati and his supporters for their alleged "betrayal" of national interests⁴⁰.

Thus, in the aftermath of the First World War, the impression that Italian diplomacy had been humiliated at Versailles resulted in its declining social prestige. This could only partly be rectified through the influx of new nationalist-minded candidates and through limited institutional reform. The new organisational pattern introduced by Count Carlo Sforza in 1920 effected internal changes in the structures of diplomacy but retained the separation of diplomacy from the state by strengthening the power of the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry⁴¹. This position was regarded by traditional diplomats as an institutional safeguard, ensuring their distance from the state and special allegiance to the Crown. The dualism between state and monarchy was not altered in the institutional make-up of the Foreign Ministry, and the appointment of Mussolini was not interpreted as a challenge to this special status.

The *Duce*'s approach to government has been characterised as etatist, namely aiming to strengthen the legitimacy of the state and the role of its various institutions⁴². This was a pivotal expectation from the "minimum consensus"

³⁹ Orsini, p. 284; Serra, *Diplomazia in Italia*, pp. 39-41

⁴⁰ Hamilton, pp. 11, 32

⁴¹ Serra, "Burocrazia", pp. 81-2

⁴² Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, p. 37; Sarti, R., "Italian Fascism: radical politics and conservative goals", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives. The radical right and the establishment in the twentieth century Europe* (London 1990), pp. 14-30; Organski, A. F. K., *The Forms of Political Development* (New York 1965), pp. 170-7; Payne, pp. 101ff; Vincent, A., *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford 1992), p. 156; Pombeni, P., "La forma partito del fascismo e del nazismo", in Bracher, K. D., Valiani, L. (eds.), *Fascismo e nazionalsocialismo* (Bologna 1986), pp. 245-6

programme but was also sponsored and systematised by the moderate nationalist wing of the PNF. Alfredo Rocco and Luigi Federzoni, who occupied key-positions (Ministers of Justice and Interior, respectively) in the fascist cabinets, promoted a model of "integral" state which promised increased power and prestige for the *Capo del Governo* by reducing the role of the Crown to a formal constitutional supervision⁴³. Faced with the problematic dualism between monarchy and state, Mussolini endorsed the etatist project not because of any firm ideological belief in the centrality of the state but as a means to provide a point of positive integration for the whole Italian population and to consolidate his personal power-base against both the King and the traditional élites. This implication was missed or ignored by the diplomatic and military leaderships who welcomed this etatism as a way to foster their influence on the decision-making process while retaining their independence through their privileged relation with the monarchy. In this sense, agreement between the Fascist leadership and the traditional hierarchies upon the concept of a "strong state" ensured co-operation in the short-term, but stemmed from radically different perceptions of authoritarianism which were bound to clash in the longer term⁴⁴.

Although Mussolini manifested his ambition to supervise foreign policy developments by keeping the portfolio for himself, an impression of continuity in the decision-making process was upheld after the March on Rome⁴⁵. With the exception of Sforza and Frassati, the overwhelming majority of high-ranking diplomats remained in their positions, in anticipation of a quick return of Giolitti to the government⁴⁶. Salvatore Contarini maintained his neuralgic post as Permanent Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, acting as an institutional check upon Mussolini's possible intrusions in the diplomatic jurisdiction. In the armed forces, the promotion

⁴³ Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 68-110 (esp. 75ff); De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. II: *L'organizzazione dello Stato Fascista, 1925-1929* (Turin 1968), pp. 166ff; Thompson, D., *State control in Fascist Italy. Culture and conformity, 1925-43* (Manchester & New York 1991), pp. 62-70; Morgan, P., *Italian Fascism, 1919-1945* (Basingstoke & London 1995), Ch. 3

⁴⁴ Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York 1994), pp. 74-6; Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, pp. 121ff

⁴⁵ Santoro, C. M., *La politica estera di una media potenza. L'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi* (Bologna 1991), pp. 157-60; Knox, M., "Il fascismo e la politica estera italiana", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S. (eds.), *La politica estera italiana (1860-1985)* (Bologna 1991), pp. 287f; Roach, G., *Il Colonialismo italiano* (Turin 1973), pp. 219-24

⁴⁶ Di Nolfo, pp. 45-6; DDI, 7th, I, 2-4/14 (29 October - 1 November, reports about the resignations of Sforza, Frassati, and the decision of the other diplomats to stay in their positions)

of General Diaz and Admiral di Revel to the Ministries of War and Navy respectively served both as a vote of confidence for the new regime and as a guarantee of the exclusive jurisdiction of the military élites in their internal affairs⁴⁷. For the first time such high-ranking officials were elevated to ministerial status, indicating their intention to keep Fascism at arm's length from both military policy and absolute power. In return for their support to the Fascist leadership throughout the 1920s, all liberal plans for structural reform in the armed forces were thwarted, leaving the military hierarchies in command of the administration of the *Regio Esercito* and the *Regia Marina*⁴⁸.

The first real test, however, was only a few months away from the March on Rome. In August 1923 Mussolini ordered the violent occupation of Corfu in retaliation to the murder of the Italian General Tellini, who presided over a League of Nations committee for the delimitation of the Greek-Albanian border⁴⁹. The subsequent crisis was a tangible manifestation of the new activist style of foreign policy which Fascist participation in government had injected into the decision-making process⁵⁰. Mussolini succeeded in catching the diplomatic élite off-guard: many senior diplomats, including Contarini, were away from Rome at the day that the *Duce* ordered the occupation of Corfu⁵¹. Subsequently, Contarini, Salandra (as the Italian representative in Geneva) and Romano Avezana (as ambassador in France) played a crucial role in diffusing the crisis, restraining Mussolini's excessive demands and saving Italy's prestige in international affairs⁵². Yet, the Fascist leader had manifested his determination to act independently from the advice of his political experts - even at the height of the crisis, he repeatedly rejected the moderating

⁴⁷ Rochat, G., "Il fascismo e la preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale", in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. G. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 156-7

⁴⁸ Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 196ff, 208ff; Rochat, *Esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, pp. 408ff; Whittam, J., "The Italian General Staff and the Coming of the Second World War", in Preston, A. (ed.), *General Staffs and Diplomacy Before the Second World War* (Totowa, New Jersey 1978), pp. 85ff

⁴⁹ For an account of the events surrounding the Corfu crisis see Barros, J., *The Corfu Incident of 1923* (Princeton 1966). See also the relevant documents in DBFP, 1st, XXIV, Ch. 4

⁵⁰ Bosworth, R. J. B., *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London 1998), pp. 93-4

⁵¹ Di Nolfo, pp. 90f; Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 41-2

⁵² Cassels, pp. 91ff; Di Nolfo, pp. 79ff; Salandra, A., *Memorie politiche, 1916-1926* (Milan 1951), pp. 101-6

counsel of Romano Avezana to accept a diplomatic compromise⁵³. In contrast to the initial by-passing of the diplomatic élite in August 1923, the Navy leadership had been actively involved since July in the preparation of a plan for the occupation of Corfu in response to expected "provocative acts" by Greece⁵⁴. The Minister of Navy, di Revel, endorsed the plan in order to underline the navy's crucial role for national security and for the country's great-power aspirations in the Mediterranean. He also seized the opportunity offered by the occupation of Corfu to claim priority for the *Regia Marina* in the allocation of resources and funds for rearmament⁵⁵.

The "decade of good behaviour" (1925-1935)

The ensuing period until the Ethiopian war has misleadingly been described as the "decade of good behaviour"⁵⁶. The term is justifiable only on the level of appearance as, after the Corfu incident, the Fascist regime did not officially commit any act of aggression in foreign policy, seemingly accepting its responsibility to contribute to European peace and stability. Although Mussolini manipulated institutional gaps to successfully establish his right to co-decide with the traditional diplomatic and military groups, the latter retained a *primary* responsibility for the handling of foreign affairs. The Palazzo Chigi averted the possibility of a choreographic celebration in Rhodes after the Treaty of Lausanne reaffirmed Italy's right to possess the Dodecanese Islands⁵⁷. Furthermore, Italy's participation in the negotiations for the Locarno Treaty was effectively promoted by the Palazzo Chigi,

⁵³ Cassels, pp. 112-23; DDI, 7th, II, 325/327. Cf. the anxiety of the diplomats in Rome in case Mussolini again changed his mind and rejected the compromise solution (DDI, 7th, II, 380)

⁵⁴ Di Nolfo, pp. 85-6

⁵⁵ Bernardi, G., *Il disarmo navale fra le due guerre mondiali (1919-1939)* (Rome 1975), pp. 215f; Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1982), p. 5

⁵⁶ The so-called "decade of good behaviour" thesis is supported by Pastorelli, L., "La storiografia italiana del dopoguerra sulla politica estera", *Storia e Politica*, 10 (1971), pp. 603ff; Halperin, S. W., *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (Princeton 1964). For a discussion and criticism of this thesis see Cassels, pp. 394f. De Felice locates the change in Mussolinian foreign policy between 1929 and 1930 ["Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in *ibid.* (ed.), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 57-74, here p. 60]. See also Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica*, pp. 43-5

⁵⁷ Guariglia, p. 27; Lowe, C. J., Marzari F., *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London & Boston 1975), pp. 186-91; Cassels, pp. 37-45. See Guariglia's objections to Mussolini's idea in DDI, 7th, I, 523

in spite of Mussolini's reservations⁵⁸. Even the signing of the Kellogg-Briand pact was accepted by Mussolini, notwithstanding his subsequent mockery of the pact's main principle of renouncing violence in international relations⁵⁹. The traditional strategy of Italian foreign policy appeared to have been restored after the Corfu crisis - cooperation with the western Powers, negotiations for colonial concessions in Africa, friendly relations with Yugoslavia, stability in Europe through multilateral arrangements.

However, the term "good behaviour" grossly understates the gradual consolidation of Mussolini's personal role in foreign policy decision-making within a framework of co-decision with the diplomatic and military hierarchies. It has been established that the *Duce's* plans for an invasion of Turkey were not resisted by either the Palazzo Chigi or the Ministry of War. The first plan was studied by the army leadership at the beginning of 1924 with discouraging conclusions, but the Matteotti crisis re-focused the attention of the Fascist regime on domestic policy and the plan was dropped⁶⁰. The second plan was organised in 1926 but was subsequently abandoned when Turkey responded to rumours of invasion with partial mobilisations⁶¹. At the same time, Mussolini received the political backing of the Palazzo Chigi for a more energetic policy in the Balkans. The signing of pacts with Rumania, Turkey, Greece and the revisionist Hungary in the second half of the 1920s underlined a priority shared by both Mussolini and the traditional diplomats for Italian infiltration in the Balkan-Adriatic region, both in political and economic terms⁶².

⁵⁸ Di Nolfo, pp. 99-138; DDI, 7th, IV, 126/129. Note Mussolini's dissatisfaction with the Locarno Pacts in Cassels, pp. 279f

⁵⁹ OO, XXII, 385 ("Discorso dell'Ascensione", Chamber of Deputies, 26 May 1927); Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, p. 45

⁶⁰ Cassels, pp. 226-30

⁶¹ DDI, 7th, III, 604; 4, 298. For the importance of the Matteotti crisis for the Italian Fascist regime see Lyttelton, A., "Fascism in Italy: The Second Wave", in Mosse, G. L. (ed.), *International Fascism* (London 1979), pp. 50ff; *ibid.*, *Seizure*, pp. 237-268; Gallo, M., *Mussolini's Italy. Twenty Years of the Fascist Era* (London 1973), pp. 181-92; Rossini, G. (ed.), *Il delitto Matteotti tra il Viminale e l'Aventino. Dagli atti del processo De Bono davanti all'Alta Corte di Giustizia* (Bologna 1966).

⁶² Knox, pp. 301ff; DDI, 7th, V, 123/333; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 18-9; Jankovic, B. M., *The Balkans in International Relations* (Basingstoke & London 1988), pp. 157ff; Albrecht-Carrié, R., *Italy from Napoleon to Mussolini* (New York 1950), pp. 196ff

The handling of the Italian policy towards Yugoslavia and Albania revealed the declining grip of the diplomatic hierarchy over Mussolini. The traditional attitude of rapprochement with Belgrade, initiated by Sforza and endorsed by Contarini, clashed with the *Duce's* intention to isolate Yugoslavia (which he perceived as the most dangerous obstacle to his plans for penetration in the Balkans⁶³) through the conclusion of pacts with the other Balkan states. Until 1926, Contarini managed to blend the two opposing principles. He promoted a friendly policy towards Yugoslavia during 1924 but also supported Mussolini's plans for the *pénétration pacifique* of Albania, culminating in the Treaty of 1925⁶⁴. For him, however, Albania was a secondary asset and not an antidote to Yugoslavia, and he hastened to remove the military implications of the Italo-Albanian alliance from the text of the treaty⁶⁵. This was his last major success in restraining Mussolini - Contarini resigned in March 1926, allowing Mussolini a significantly larger share of political freedom and enabling him to rehearse a more aggressive anti-Yugoslav policy after 1926, even to the point of contemplating a military campaign in 1927⁶⁶.

The departure of Contarini had both personal and institutional implications for foreign policy decision-making. His resignation terminated an anomalous situation, in which Contarini - representing traditional diplomatic interests- was bracketed by Mussolini - Foreign Minister - and Dino Grandi - one of the *quadrumvires* and Under-Secretary since 1925⁶⁷. Contarini's successor, Bordonaro, lacked the political will of his predecessor, thus allowing Grandi larger institutional space for action. With the departure of Bordonaro for London, the position of Secretary General remained deliberately vacant, a development which eliminated a symbolic "diaphragm" of the Foreign Ministry's independence from state

⁶³ See, for example, his comments in Scritti, II, 55-7 ("Alle Alpi Giulie", *Popolo d'Italia*, 22 February 1920); II, 121-2 ("Fiume", in *Popolo d'Italia*, 2 December 1920). See also, Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 4-5, 18-21, for an analysis

⁶⁴ Di Nolfo, Ch. 4; Knox, p. 301

⁶⁵ Lessona, A., *Memorie* (Florence 1958), pp. 108ff

⁶⁶ Cassels, pp. 315-52; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 208-9, 216-7, 227; Knox, "Fascismo e la politica estera italiana", pp. 302-5

⁶⁷ Cassels, pp. 283-7; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 209-10; De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. I: *La conquista del potere, 1932-1925* (Turin 1966), pp. 559-63; Santarelli, E., *Storia del movimento e del regime fascista*, vol. I (Rome 1967), pp. 447-8

intervention and was greatly resented by traditional diplomats⁶⁸. At the same time, the pace of administrative reform accelerated. The appointment of Grandi as Under-Secretary in 1925 constituted an attempt to expand Fascism both in mentality and the personnel within the Palazzo Chigi⁶⁹. Since 1927, membership of the PNF became a prerequisite for retaining or acquiring influential diplomatic posts⁷⁰. This was a direct assault on the bureaucratic, non-partisan character of Italian diplomacy but was unsuccessfully resisted by the diplomats. Meanwhile, the departure of older officials served the regime's plan to further erode the elitist, conservative composition of the diplomatic corps. The law of 1927 prompted the influx of new personnel in the Foreign Ministry a year later, the majority of whom either came directly from Fascist organisations or were more sympathetic to the philosophy of the regime. The so-called *ventottisti* formed the first generation of new officials in the process of constructing a "Fascist" ruling class⁷¹.

The promotion of Grandi to the position of Foreign Minister in 1929 accentuated the impression of "fascistisation" in the Palazzo Chigi and increased fears that the influence of the traditional diplomatic élites would be curtailed. This was not the case, however, in the short term. The intrusion of the *ventottisti* was mainly confined to the lower echelons of bureaucracy, while key-positions - such as the General Directors and major Ambassadors- remained firmly in the hands of experienced diplomats like Guariglia, Lojacono and di Rosso. The ability of the traditional diplomatic élite to adapt to the changing administrative structures without compromising their political priorities resulted in the gradual absorption of this new generation of officials to the spirit of responsible diplomacy. Membership of the PNF remained a formal concession to the party's totalitarian pretensions, devoid of any political consequence. As for Grandi himself, in many ways he was an unlikely candidate for the "fascistisation" of Italian diplomacy and foreign policy. A

⁶⁸ Orsini, pp. 290-2

⁶⁹ Guariglia, pp. 53-4; DDI, 7th, V, 255

⁷⁰ Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 70ff; Melis, G., "La burocrazia", in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. G. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 244-76

⁷¹ Aquarone, A., *L'organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin 1965), pp. 101ff; Hughes, S., "The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism: 1922-1932", in Craig, G., Gilbert, F. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats 1919-1939* (Princeton, NJ 1953), pp. 210-33; Gilbert, F., "Ciano and his Ambassadors" in Craig, G., Gilbert, F. (eds.), *The Diplomats* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 516-7; Orsini, pp. 292f

representative of the moderate, etatist wing of the PNF and an opponent of the notion of an omnipotent hyper-party, he remained sensitive to Mussolini's demands for great-power diplomacy and was by no means averse to an activist foreign policy which would include the option of going to war⁷². Yet he also showed an increasing reliance upon the professional expertise of the traditional diplomats, as well as a sense of realism which eventually clashed with Mussolini's more adventurous foreign policy initiatives⁷³. His policy of *peso determinante* (determinant weight) aimed to coalesce the *Duce's* vision of Italy as the arbiter of the European system with the diplomats' cautious style and focus on stability⁷⁴. After 1930, Grandi became increasingly alarmed at the rise of the NSDAP in Germany and sought a reorientation of Italian foreign policy, promoting an understanding with France, in accordance with the priorities of the conservative diplomats⁷⁵. He also displayed a determination to make Italy play an active role in the League of Nations, especially regarding the issue of disarmament, which caused repeated frictions between the Minister and the *Capo del Governo*⁷⁶. Grandi's constructive approach to the Hoover plan for a proportional reduction of armaments was strongly criticised by Mussolini and contributed to his dismissal in July 1932⁷⁷. According to the *Duce*, Grandi had "gone to bed" with the western democracies, making Italy a prisoner of the League of Nations⁷⁸.

⁷² On Grandi's ideas on foreign policy see Nello, P., *Un fedele disubbidiente. Dino Grandi dal palazzo Chigi al 25 luglio* (Bologna 1993)

⁷³ See, for example, Guariglia, 63f, 81f; Orsini, 306-7; Gilbert, pp. 513-4

⁷⁴ See Grandi's own analysis of his vision in Nello (ed.), *Dino Grandi*, pp. 300ff (speech to the Grand Council, 2 October 1930). For an assessment see De Felice, R., "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in *ibid.* (ed.), *L' Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 57-74; *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 367ff

⁷⁵ See the analysis in Knox, M., "The fascist regime, its foreign policy and its wars", in Finney, P., (ed.), *The Origins of the First World War* (London & New York), pp. 160-1; De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 411-3; Santarelli, E., *Storia del movimento e del regime fascista*, II, pp. 84-6

⁷⁶ See, for example, his speech to the Chamber of Deputies, in Nello, P. (ed.), *Dino Grandi: la politica estera dell'Italia dal 1929 al 1932* (Rome 1985), pp. 451-71 (14 March 1931). See also Guariglia, pp. 176-8; Orsini, pp. 310-1; Knox, pp. 312ff; Moscati, R., Torre, A. *et al.* (eds.), *La politica estera italiana* (Turin 1963), pp. 112ff

⁷⁷ For Grandi's attitude to the Hoover plan see Nello (ed.), *Dino Grandi*, pp. 513-9 (speech at the London Conference, 20 July 1931). For Mussolini's reactions and Grandi's dismissal see Aloisi, P. *Journal 25 Juin-14 Juillet 1936* (Paris 1957), pp. 5ff; Di Nolfo, p. 304; Guariglia, pp. 176ff

⁷⁸ Cantalupo, R., *Fu la Spagna. Ambasciata presso Franco, febbraio-aprile 1937* (Milan 1948), pp. 42ff

By the time of Grandi's departure for the Embassy in London the Foreign Ministry had successfully digested the wave of the *ventottisti* and retained its influence on the shaping of foreign policy. However, a more subtle and potentially erosive procedure had already been set in motion - Mussolini's *personal, parallel diplomacy*. This practice was a projection of the *Duce's* authoritarianism and preference for personal rule in the field of foreign affairs. In 1925 Contarini painfully realised his superior's liking for secret diplomacy when he was informed of the activities of a personal emissary of Mussolini, Lessona, in the conclusion of the Italo-Albanian pact of 1925, unbeknownst even to the most senior officials of the Palazzo Chigi⁷⁹. Secret meetings between Mussolini's emissaries and German radical nationalists were mainly handled by the *Duce* himself, by-passing both his diplomats in Rome and the Italian Embassy in Berlin, with the Ambassador De Bosdari, who resigned in protest in 1926, repeatedly complaining about his marginalisation⁸⁰. Plans for an Italian-German cooperation in a war against France were constantly on top of Mussolini's secret agenda⁸¹. At the same time that Grandi followed a rapprochement with the *Quai D'Orsay* where Ethiopia was for the first time mentioned as possible compensation for Italian friendship by Laval, Mussolini not only rejected his minister's efforts in this direction but also continued to contradict Grandi's official policy towards Yugoslavia and the disarmament negotiations⁸². The secret backing of Macedonian and Croat terrorist-separatist organisations in Yugoslavia contradicted the efforts for a *détente* with Belgrade⁸³. Grandi himself was definitely aware of such dealings, but he was increasingly kept uninformed about the revisionist initiatives of his leader in Yugoslavia, Hungary and Germany⁸⁴. In a

⁷⁹ Lessona, A., *Memorie*, (Florence 1958), pp. 108ff; Di Nolfo, pp. 183-5

⁸⁰ Schieder, W., "Fascismo e nazionalsocialismo nei primi anni Trenta" in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. G. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 45-56; Schubert, G., *Anfänge Nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik* (Cologne 1961), pp. 150-67; Cassels, pp. 165ff (and DDI, 7th, III, 85, for De Bosdari's complaints).

⁸¹ Cassels, pp. 153-9

⁸² For Grandi's talks with Laval in 1931 see De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 392-402; Lowe, Marzari, Ch. 10; Di Nolfo, Chs. 5, 7. See also Mussolini's defiant comments

⁸³ For the secret negotiations between the fascist regime and the *Ustasi*, see Sadkovich, J. J., *Italian Support for Croat Separatism, 1927-1937* (New York 1987); Robertson, E. M., *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER* (London 1977), pp. 23-7, 35; Aloisi, pp. 42, 49; DDI, 7th, VI, 131/ 514/ 518-9; Knox, pp. 307-8

⁸⁴ Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, 22f

similar vein, while Grandi was discussing with Briand the prospects of a disarmament pact, Mussolini commented sarcastically that "words are nice things, but guns, ...ships, aircrafts and cannons are even nicer"⁸⁵. In this sense, paradoxically, the dismissal of Grandi was a blow to the traditional diplomats' control over foreign policy. At the same time, the formal abolition of the position of Secretary General in 1932 was only a symbolic reflection of the loss of the Foreign Ministry's institutional independence and the beginning of its relegation, first, to a consultative and, finally, to a purely functional status⁸⁶.

In the armed forces, the progress of "fascistisation" was equally unimpressive until 1935, but the cooperation with Mussolini proved less problematic⁸⁷. The army's support for the regime during the Matteotti crisis⁸⁸ was of crucial importance and ensured the continuation of the military élites' primary jurisdiction in their internal affairs. In 1925 such a traditional figure as Pietro Badoglio was appointed Chief of General Staff and proved instrumental in providing support for the regime's plans against Turkey in 1926 and against Yugoslavia throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s⁸⁹. The *Regio Esercito*'s operational plan (defensive against France, offensive in the Balkans) endorsed Mussolini's anti-French and anti-Yugoslav orientation. Indoctrination and internal organisations were mainly left to the military élites with only some superficial attempts at "fascistisation"⁹⁰. Mussolini's only notable initiative concerned his eventual rejection in 1927 of an initial plan for the creation of a powerful General Staff under Badoglio⁹¹. This decision thwarted any attempt to centralise military control, co-ordinate resources and promote a more powerful role of the military leadership in the shaping of foreign policy⁹². The implications of this rejection were not felt immediately, but this decision would weaken the armed

⁸⁵ OO, XXIV, 235ff (speech in Florence, 17 August 1930); Di Nolfo, 282ff

⁸⁶ Orsini, pp. 311-2; Serra, "La burocrazia", pp. 82-3

⁸⁷ Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 208f; Rochat, "Preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale", pp. 158-9

⁸⁸ Whittam, J., "The Italian General Staff and the Coming of the Second World War", pp. 86-7; Lyttelton, "Second Wave", pp. 52ff;

⁸⁹ Knox, pp. 302-3

⁹⁰ Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 219-20; "Mussolini e le forze armate", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, A. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 113-26; Thompson, pp. 87-9

⁹¹ Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 211-2; "Preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale", pp. 158f

⁹² See, in this study, Ch.6, Section VIa

forces' influence upon, and resistance to, future aggressive decisions of the regime⁹³. If in 1932 Badoglio could successfully counter the plan for an invasion of Ethiopia by invoking logistical problems, a similar attitude would soon prove to be ineffective to arrest Mussolini's growing expansionist ambitions.

The Ethiopian campaign (1935-36)

The background to the decision to attack Ethiopia serves as an all-round case-study for the realisation of the gradual changes in foreign policy decision-making. After Grandi's departure, the pattern Mussolini (Foreign Minister) - Suvich (Under-Secretary) accentuated tendencies that were introduced after 1929⁹⁴. Suvich, a fervent exponent of an anti-German line in foreign policy, repeatedly echoed similar complaints to those of Grandi before 1932 - monopoly of important decisions by the *Duce*, lack of information about diplomatic initiatives, less and less consultation in the shaping of foreign policy⁹⁵. The resistance of the traditional diplomats to Mussolini's growing inclination towards an alliance with Germany was epitomised in Suvich's numerous memoranda in the first months of 1936. The Under-Secretary described sacrificing the independence of Austria as a "colossal error" of judgement and did not fail to point out to his *Capo* that Italian foreign policy suffered from lack of direction, upholding Locarno on the one hand, and encouraging Germany's revisionism on the other⁹⁶. Yet, the traditional diplomats' disagreements were neutralised by the *Duce*'s dependence on parallel diplomacy. This was a tendency that was reciprocated by Hitler's eagerness to by-pass the equally unenthusiastic leadership of the *Wilhelmstrasse* in his dealings with the Italian regime for a "fascist" alliance. Goering became the link of the Nazi leadership with the PNF through direct

⁹³ Knox, M., *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941. Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge, 1982), Ch. 1; Rochat, "Mussolini e le forze armate", pp. 120-2

⁹⁴ Orsini, pp. 316ff

⁹⁵ Suvich, F., *Memorie 1932-1936* (Milan 1984), pp. 4ff

⁹⁶ See DDI, 8th, III, 194 (memorandum 7.2.1936)/ /533 (memorandum 26.3.1936) respectively

contact with Balbo and the Head of the party's Foreign Affairs Office Renzetti⁹⁷. After 1936, with the consolidation of the Axis alliance, he was assigned by Hitler special responsibility for the handling of the German-Italian affairs⁹⁸. At the same time, the natural retirement of the old guard of Italian diplomacy in the early 1930s facilitated a deep personnel change in the Foreign Ministry. A second massive influx of new officials, coupled with radical changes in most embassies and directorates of the Ministry in 1932, irreversibly eroded the continuity of Italian diplomacy⁹⁹. The Palazzo Chigi again digested this second major reorganisation and salvaged its traditional spirit of a semi-autonomous bureaucracy. Yet, the absence of strong personalities, willing to retain their professional independence from the regime's demands, and Mussolini's growing tendency to conduct a personal diplomacy, pushed the Italian Foreign Ministry a further step down in terms of political influence.

The unilateral introduction of conscription in Germany offered some ephemeral breathing space to traditional diplomats. Mussolini was forced to contemplate an agreement with France and to contribute to the creation of the Stresa Front against Germany's aggression in the spring of 1935¹⁰⁰. Even regarding the thoughts for a campaign against Ethiopia, the impression of British and French support or *disinteressement* for a war in Africa was a source of some consolation¹⁰¹. The Ethiopian plan presented for the diplomats a much lesser evil to Mussolini's tendency to meddle with European stability - it entailed the abandonment of the Croat plan¹⁰², opened the way for a cooperation with France against Germany, and

⁹⁷ Segrè, C. G., *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1987), pp. 353-9; Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER*, pp. 56f; Overy, R. J., *Goering. The 'Iron Man'* (London 1984), pp. 32-3

⁹⁸ Weinberg, G. L., *Hitler's Foreign Policy*, Vol. II: *Starting World War II* (Chicago & London 1980), pp. 268ff

⁹⁹ Orsini, pp. 313f; Serra, "Burocrazia", pp. 83-4

¹⁰⁰ Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome 1980), pp. 117ff; Gilbert, pp. 527f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 259ff. See also, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IVa

¹⁰¹ DDI, 7th, X, 423; De Felice, R., "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in *ibid.* (ed.), *L' Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 67f; Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 47ff

¹⁰² Knox, "Fascismo e la politica estera italiana", pp. 317ff; Pelagalli, S., "Il generale Pietro Gàzzera al ministero della guerra (1928-1933)", *Storia Contemporanea*, 20 (1989), pp. 1040-50

deflected Mussolini's activism to the *politica periferica*¹⁰³. The *Duce* could also count on some support from the armed forces and even from the Crown for a *limited* operation against Ethiopia, which was widely regarded as a legitimate target of Italian expansionism, especially after the trauma of Adowa in 1896¹⁰⁴.

Yet, this initial atmosphere of consensus was quickly shattered. In the summer of 1935, opposition by the western powers became evident, highlighting the potentially destabilising effect of the plan for the European system and the Stresa front in particular¹⁰⁵. Eventually, the Palazzo Chigi bowed to the inevitable, but at least played a role in delaying the action and in averting a total rift with Britain and France. The complexity and delicacy of the ensuing situation did convince Mussolini to consult his diplomatic experts, especially in legitimising the aggressive action in the League of Nations and in minimising the extent of sanctions¹⁰⁶. However, the initiative now rested with the *Duce*. Even at the height of the Ethiopian crisis, when Mussolini announced his decision to accept a "satellite" status for Austria in January 1936, the exhortations of Suvich to reconsider this *volte-face* proved fruitless¹⁰⁷. From now on, the Foreign Ministry would have to fight hard to retain some consultative authority in the face of Mussolini's personal foreign policy.

For the armed forces, the period of preparation for the Ethiopian campaign was a crude awakening to the regime's tightening grip on military issues. Mussolini's decision to hand responsibility for the campaign to the more "Fascist" Ministry of Colonies headed by De Bono¹⁰⁸, forced Badoglio and the military leadership to hasten their contribution to the planning process¹⁰⁹. However, the overruling of the initial decision for a limited campaign in favour of a full-scale war involving more than 300,000 men raised voices of protest in the armed forces about the logistical

¹⁰³ Robertson, *Empire-BUILDER*, pp. 93-113; De Felice, R., *Gli anni del consenso*, pp. 399f

¹⁰⁴ Mack Smith, *Monarchy*, p. 271; Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 247f

¹⁰⁵ Guariglia, pp. 220ff; De Felice, *Il Duce*, pp. 526ff; "Alcune osservazioni", pp. 67f; Thompson, G. H., *Front-Line Diplomat* (London 1959), pp. 96ff

¹⁰⁶ Suvich, *Memorie*, 275ff. For the diplomatic background to the decision to impose sanctions on Italy see Lowe, Marzari, pp. 283-90

¹⁰⁷ Orsini, pp. 317ff

¹⁰⁸ Rochat, G., *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia* (Milan 1971), pp. 110ff; Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 247f

¹⁰⁹ Rochat, Massobrio, 247f

impossibility of such action. Repeated memoranda by Badoglio, asking for more time and resources¹¹⁰, underlined the growing gap between Mussolini's expansionist aspirations and the more limited objectives of the military leadership¹¹¹. A further blow was the appointment of De Bono - and not Badoglio - in command of the operation which started in October 1935¹¹². De Bono's subsequent failure to deliver a swift military breakthrough in Ethiopia was a god-sent gift for the military leadership, paving the way to his substitution by Badoglio and the successful occupation of Addis Abeba in May 1936¹¹³. Yet, the prestige for the victory was not reaped by the armed forces. Instead, the *Impero* was presented by the regime as a "Fascist" achievement. Mussolini carefully orchestrated a celebration for Badoglio's return to Rome which deliberately fell short of a "national hero's" reception. Everybody stepped in to claim a share of the glory - the Crown participated actively both in the build-up to victory and to the celebrations for the declaration of the *Impero*, and even the Catholic Church sanctioned the campaign as a *mission civilisatrice*¹¹⁴. Yet, it was the cult of the *Duce* that received the lion's share of the popularity boost, even for the attainment of such a traditional goal of Italian foreign policy¹¹⁵. It was a meaningful reminder of Mussolini's power that the King had to share the title of the First Marshal of the Empire with the *Duce*, in spite of Victor Emmanuel's token role as head of the armed forces¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁰ Rochat, *Militari*, 324ff; Robertson, *Empire-BUILDER*, pp. 98ff; Rochat, G., *Il Colonialismo italiano* (Turin 1973), pp. 137ff; Lowe, pp. 280-3. See also Badoglio's comments in Bottai, *Diario*, 16.1.1936

¹¹¹ Petersen, J., "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L' Italia fra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 42f; Rochat, G., "Il ruolo delle forze armate nel regime fascista: conclusioni provvisorie e ipotesi di lavoro", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1972), pp. 191-2

¹¹² Rochat, Massobrio, p. 250f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 242-50; Bottai, *Diario*, 17.11.1935

¹¹³ For the appointment of Badoglio see Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 139-45; Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 251f; Bottai, *Diario*, 19.12.1935

¹¹⁴ Mack Smith, *Monarchy*, pp. 270ff; Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 140ff, where excerpts from Messineo, P., "Propagazione della civiltà ed espansione coloniale", from *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 16 May 1936, pp. 290-303, are quoted. See also Jemolo, A. C., *Church and State in Italy, 1850-1950* (Oxford 1960), pp. 260-1; Binchy, D. A., *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (Oxford 1970, 2nd ed.), pp. 637-51

¹¹⁵ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, vol. II: *Lo Stato Totalitario, 1936-1940* (Turin 1981), pp. 6-7; Thompson, pp. 140-2

¹¹⁶ Tranfaglia, N., "La modernizzazione contraddittoria negli anni della stabilizzazione del regime (1926-1936)", in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. C. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e*

Towards war: 1936-39

The ensuing three years (1936-39) reaffirmed the signs of a proceeding *mussolinismo* in the Italian Fascist system. The appointment of Count Galeazzo Ciano as Foreign Minister again had both an institutional and a personal significance¹¹⁷. Since Ciano had pioneered a strongly pro-German approach to foreign policy and had criticised Suvich for not exploiting the German card during the Ethiopian campaign¹¹⁸, his promotion reflected Mussolini's victory over the policy of equidistance, sponsored by the traditional diplomats in the Palazzo Chigi. The dismissal of Suvich was accompanied by a third wave of new personnel in the Foreign Ministry. This time, an already weakened conservative diplomatic élite was outnumbered and capitulated to the new influx¹¹⁹. At the same time, Ciano's pro-German attitude clashed with the traditional lines of diplomacy, thus enhancing the gap between the leadership and the experienced officials of the Foreign Ministry. Administrative reforms after 1936 emphasised the shift of political weight from the traditional diplomatic hierarchies to the *Gabinetto* of the Ministry¹²⁰, a change which reflected the growing political character of foreign policy-making and the marginalisation of professional expertise.

However, Ciano himself had more far-reaching plans for the Foreign Ministry. Although largely unpopular amongst party leading figures and despised by the older generation of Fascist *gerarchi*, he was the most prominent figure of a new generation of Fascists that epitomised the growing self-confidence of the regime. More importantly, Ciano, who had risen to political prominence as Minister of Popular Culture, was very sensitive to the propagandistic dimensions and functions

storiografia (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 132f. For a more detailed discussion of the Ethiopian campaign from a diplomatic point of view see, in this study, Ch. 4, IVa

¹¹⁷ Guerri, G. B., *Galeazzo Ciano. Una vita, 1903/1944* (Milan 1979), pp. 160ff; Morgan, pp. 148ff; Santarelli, E., II, pp. 226-8

¹¹⁸ For Ciano's comments see Bottai, *Diario*, 7.1/9.3.1936; Guariglia, pp. 328-9. For Ciano's general attitude towards the diplomats see Orsini, 319-28

¹¹⁹ Serra, *Diplomazia*, pp. 43-4

¹²⁰ Serra, "Burocrazia", pp. 83-6; Donosti, M., *Mussolini e l'Europa* (Rome 1945), pp. 12ff; Gilbert, pp. 517ff; Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, pp. 163ff

of foreign policy. In this sense, his approach to the handling of foreign affairs was fundamentally more populist than the cautious, professional techniques of traditional diplomacy¹²¹. His appointment to the Palazzo Chigi signified Mussolini's determination to accelerate the process of "fascistisation", after the less satisfactory experiments with Grandi and Suvich, and to inject an air of unconventionality in policy-making that was alien to the perceptions of the conservative diplomatic élites. As Foreign Minister, Ciano entertained a close personal relation with the *Duce*, a relation that enabled him to play a more active role in the shaping of Fascist foreign policy and to be kept informed of Mussolini's plans and oscillations. This type of close communication had hampered the two previous patterns in the Palazzo Chigi since 1929 and provided the basis for a more effective integration of the Foreign Ministry into the "Fascist" state¹²².

At the same time, Ciano was widely regarded - and definitely regarded himself - as a strong candidate to succeed Mussolini, in spite of reactions from senior Fascists (most notably De Bono, Farinacci and De Vecchi) at the Grand Council meeting of 21 March 1939, when a list of possible candidates was discussed¹²³. His privileged relation with the *Duce* and the latter's unconditional support enhanced his political legitimacy and enabled him to create a personal authoritarian rule in the Ministry. In many ways, the Palazzo Chigi under Ciano was a miniature of the authoritarian character of the regime itself. The Foreign Minister could claim the exclusive right of interpreting Mussolini's intentions, consulting his favourite diplomats whenever he deemed it necessary and marginalising those officials who were less compliant at his own discretion. In this sense, the gap between Minister and diplomats was systematically widened, removing the latter's political role as group and reducing them to a purely functional status. Mussolini's tendency to conduct an independent foreign policy found a perfect institutional medium in Ciano's personal diplomacy until the summer of 1939, where for the first time the identity between the

¹²¹ Vigezzi, B., "Mussolini, Ciano, la diplomazia italiana e la percezione della 'politica dei potenze' al' inizio della seconda guerra mondiale", in di Nolfo, E., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L' Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan, 1986), pp. 3-18; Gilbert, pp. 515-7

¹²² Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, Ch. 6. Cf. Ciano's nostalgic comments about his relationship with the *Duce* in *Ciano's Diaries*, 8.2.1943

¹²³ Orsini, pp. 324-5. For the Grand Council meeting see Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 367-8

two men was shattered with regard to the policy towards Germany. By that time, however, Ciano's identification with the *Capo del Governo* had deprived him of his political influence over the *Duce*. His strong opposition to Mussolini's pro-German policy failed to form an alternative concept of foreign policy which could seriously challenge the *Duce*'s omnipotence in the handling of foreign affairs¹²⁴.

As for the armed forces, the presence of Badoglio as Chief of the General Staff until December 1940 kept up appearances of continuity in the military leadership. However, Mussolini's increasing capacity to control new appointments throughout the 1930s had, by 1936, promoted a new generation of officials (Pariani, Roatta, Valle, Graziani) in the three arms¹²⁵. This group of officials appeared more accommodating to the regime's demands and less willing to resist the propagandistic use of the armed forces by Mussolini. While the old Badoglio group maintained the traditional line of avoiding a conflict with Britain, the new Chief of the Army Staff Pariani drafted an operational plan in December 1937, based on the assumption of a German-Italian alliance against the western powers¹²⁶. Success in Ethiopia nurtured a misplaced optimism about the armed forces' capabilities that even the setbacks in Spain could not overshadow. While Badoglio and, later in 1940-1, Graziani voiced their concerns about the over-ambitious plans for military action, Mussolini was in a position to overrule the military experts and use the armed forces as a functional device of his foreign policy.

The Spanish Civil War exposed all the above developments. Unlike Ethiopia, Spain did not fare in any plan or traditional ambition of Italian foreign policy, except as a possible option in Mussolini's vision of Mediterranean domination¹²⁷. On logistical grounds, the military leadership opposed participation, pressing instead for some time of peace to recover from the Ethiopian campaign and to improve the fighting capability of the armed forces¹²⁸. Ciano, however, ignored the cautious

¹²⁴ Gilbert, pp. 531-5; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 46-7. See also, in this study, Ch. 6, Sections II and III

¹²⁵ Rochat, Massobrio, 220ff

¹²⁶ Morewood, S., "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and Middle East 1935-1940", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M., (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London 1989), pp. 185-6; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 35ff

¹²⁷ See, in this study, Ch. 2, Section IV

¹²⁸ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, Ch. 1; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 99ff

counsel of traditional diplomats and sponsored the idea of active military involvement with an enthusiasm that boosted Mussolini's Mediterranean ambitions¹²⁹. Once decision for limited participation had been made, everybody stepped in to prove themselves worthy of their leader's trust. The issue was discussed summarily in the Grand Council and elicited unanimous approval. General Roatta, head of the SIM (*Servizio Informazioni Militare*, intelligence service) played an important role in stepping up the pace of Italian intervention after December 1936 and organised the operations in Guadalajara and the air-raids on Spanish cities¹³⁰. As for Ciano, he showed a determination to make the Spanish Civil War a success not only for Italy's military intervention but also for a "fascist" co-ordination. In his visit to Germany in October 1936, he pressed for closer cooperation between Italy and Germany, both in military and diplomatic terms¹³¹. The joint premature recognition of the Burgos government by the two regimes defied both military problems (defeat at Guadalajara, slow progress of Nationalist forces) and diplomatic advice, indicating the triumph of the Mussolini-Ciano line of activist foreign policy¹³².

The final stage in the relegation of military and diplomatic groups to a functional role with no serious political influence came with the consolidation of the Axis alliance. This marked a clear departure from traditional concepts of cooperation with the Britain-France or "equidistance" between western powers and Germany, and its warlike implications alarmed the military leadership and many traditional diplomats¹³³. Yet, this opposition did not lead to a last-ditch attempt to reverse this far-reaching reorientation of Italian foreign policy. Collective decision-making had been substituted by the intuitive personal diplomacy of Mussolini and Ciano, who alone negotiated the military alliance with Germany, who alone closed the doors to British overtures in January 1939, who alone concluded the Pact of Steel in May

¹²⁹ Cantalupo, pp. 65ff; Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, pp. 225-74; Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 256-9; Santarelli, E., II, pp. 244ff. See also Ciano's own determination to make this war a success for fascism in Muggeridge, M. (ed.), *Ciano's Diary, 1937-1938* (London 1952), 20 December 1937 [henceforward cited as *Ciano's Diaries*]

¹³⁰ Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 101-2; Rochat, Massobrio, pp. 256-7

¹³¹ Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936* (Chicago 1970), p. 294f; Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 52ff; Gilbert, pp. 520-2

¹³² Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, pp. 234-8

¹³³ Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, Ch. 8; Santarelli, E., II, pp. 248-65;

1939, while deliberately keeping ambassadors and diplomats uninformed¹³⁴. The King found out about this pact after it had been signed¹³⁵, but the fact that, although he did not formally ratify it, this was no prerequisite for the pact's validity shows the Crown's weak margins of resistance and its waning institutional power of intervention. The Cavallero Memorandum, which Mussolini submitted to Hitler only days after the signing of the Pact of Steel, offered some assurances to the military leadership that the conflict might not be imminent. In it, the *Duce* insisted on the need for careful preparation for a future war after a respite of at least three years. Yet, even these additional *caveats* did not suffice to alleviate the unpopularity of the alliance amongst high-ranking military officials¹³⁶. No effort was made by the leadership of the *Regio Esercito* to promote joint military or political talks in the context of the Axis¹³⁷. Even when Ciano reverted to an anti-German line after his meeting with von Ribbentrop and Hitler in August 1939, no concerted action could be taken by diplomatic and military élites to ensure a permanent neutrality. In spite of private objections to the Axis alliance by prominent Fascist figures, such as Bottai and Grandi¹³⁸, there was no expressed opposition in the Grand Council or in the Council of Ministers meetings at the end of May¹³⁹. Only Ciano spoke directly to a wavering Mussolini on a number of occasions during the autumn and winter of 1939, but even his special relation to the *Duce* did not suffice to avert Italy's entry into the war in the long run¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁴ Toscano, M., *Le origini diplomatiche del patto d'acciaio* (Florence 1956), pp. 308ff; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 163-5; Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, pp. 460ff; Santoro, *Politica estera di una media potenza*, pp. 170-1

¹³⁵ Mack Smith, *Monarchy*, pp. 279-80

¹³⁶ For the Cavallero Memorandum see DDI, 8th, XXII, pp. 49-51 (text); Quartararo, pp. 468ff; Candeloro, G., *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 9: *Il fascismo e le sue guerre* (Milan 1998, 8th ed.), pp. 482-3. For the unpopularity of the Axis see Mussolini's own admission in Bottai, *Diario*, 8 October 1938; and the analysis in Colarizi, S., "L'opinione pubblica italiana di fronte all'intervento in guerra", in Di Nolfo, A., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan 1986), pp. 296ff; Gilbert, pp. 533-4

¹³⁷ Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 168

¹³⁸ See Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 129-30. See also Grandi's comments quoted in Quartararo, pp. 468, 489. For prominent Fascists' attitudes to the alliance with Germany see, in this study, Ch. 5, Section IIc

¹³⁹ Bottai, *Diario*, 31.5.1939

¹⁴⁰ See, in this study, Ch. 6, Sections II and III

Germany: a "parallel" state

Long-term features of the German system and Hitler's "divide-and-rule" technique (1933-5)

In Germany, the traditional framework of foreign policy decision-making presented a number of significant differences to the Italian model. First of all, the particular form of state that was entrusted to the Nazi executive in January 1933 had been regarded as a "liberal" experiment, and one stigmatised by the events of 1918¹⁴¹. The obvious lack of legitimacy, which had plagued the Weimar Republic from the moment of its foundation but reached a terminal point in the 1930-33 period, convinced the various traditional élite groups that the widespread need for *change* could not be promoted through some sort of identification with the present state¹⁴², as was the case in Italy. Instead, the search for a new institutional arrangement entailed a clear break with the Weimar experience and a move towards an authoritarian solution with "caesarist" features, in which the autonomy and primacy of the traditional élite groups would be reinstated and enhanced.

In the field of foreign policy making, the Weimar Republic attempted but failed to integrate the military, diplomatic and economic aspects of decision-making into a co-ordinated mechanism of state policy. Increasingly after 1930 the collapse of liberal institutions allowed the groups involved in these areas of decision-making a much wider margin for manoeuvre and resulted in the strengthening of their direct political links to President Hindenburg. This reverted the system to a situation

¹⁴¹ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, II, pp. 220-1; Bessel, R., "The Formation and Dissolution of a German National Electorate: From Kaiserreich to Third Reich", in Jones, L. E., Retallack, J. (eds.), *Elections, Mass Politics, and Social Change in Modern Germany* (Cambridge 1992), pp. 399-418 (here pp. 410f); and Matthias, E., "The Influence of the Versailles Treaty on the Internal Development of the Weimar Republic", in Nicholls, A., Matthias, E. (eds.), *German Democracy and the Triumph of Hitler* (London 1971), pp. 13-28; Weinberg, G. L., *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays on Modern German and World History* (Cambridge 1995), p. 32

¹⁴² For the importance of the element of "change" in the National Socialist appeal to the masses see Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 98f; Sternhell, Z., "Fascist Ideology", in Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 356f. See also Kershaw, *Hitler-Myth*, pp. 64f, especially the disillusionment of NSDAP voters in 1934 with the regime's failure to justify the promise of "change".

reminiscent of the pre-1918 period, in which the élite groups drew their legitimacy from their identification with the Head of State (then the Hohenzollern, now the "hero" of the First World War, Field-Marshal Hindenburg)¹⁴³. The presidential dictatorship of the post-1930 period recreated an institutional gap between high politics and the parliamentary-party system, a gap which the traditional military and diplomatic élites hastened to exploit in order to safeguard their primary role and autonomy in an authoritarian system.

The second major difference in Germany was the *de facto* traditional institutional strength and prestige of the armed forces and the diplomatic corps¹⁴⁴. Unlike in Italy, the *Reichswehr* was regarded as a pillar of the German state. The militarist structures of the Prussian system survived to a great extent in the Bismarckian and Wilhelminian states, embodied in the role of the Emperor as both the head of state and supreme Commander of the armed forces¹⁴⁵. In the Weimar years this link did seem to fade out, given the pluralism of the system and the emphasis on the power of the *Reichstag* as the main pillar of the system. After the failed experiments of General von Seeckt with active revisionism in alliance with the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, the new Defence Minister, Groener, promoted a new concept of military policy, based on the principles of disarmament, peaceful revisionism and cooperation with the western Powers¹⁴⁶. In this sense, he attempted to integrate the armed forces into the Republican political framework, aligning military to diplomatic policy and subjecting the autonomy of the *Reichswehr* to the control of the state¹⁴⁷. This was a novel arrangement for the traditionally militaristic spirit of the German armed forces and was greatly resented by the majority of conservative officers, who kept flirting with ideas of war against Poland and France, rejecting in principle the "inaction" of Weimar foreign policy. Groener's dogma

¹⁴³ Vogelsang, T., "Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 (1954), pp. 436f

¹⁴⁴ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 225-35

¹⁴⁵ Müller, K.-J., "Structure and Nature", pp. 139-42; Messerschmidt, M., *Militär und Politik in der Bismarckzeit und im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Darmstadt 1975)

¹⁴⁶ Carsten, pp. 245ff; Geyer, M., *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit? Die Reichswehr und die Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936* (Wiesbaden 1980), pp. 80ff, 200ff; Deist, W., Messerschmidt, M., Volkmann, H.-E., Wette, W., "Causes and Preconditions of German Aggression", in Deist, W. (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa 1985), pp. 336-53, esp. pp. 339-40

¹⁴⁷ Deist, W., *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament* (London & Basingstoke 1981), pp. 13ff

could be upheld so long as the Republic enjoyed a minimum of political stability and an agreement of disarmament in the Geneva negotiations appeared a plausible prospect¹⁴⁸. When both these conditions were thwarted by the early 1930s, the *Reichswehr* leadership distanced itself from the Republic's concept of revisionism and reverted to a more aggressive agenda based on the unilateral repudiation of the Versailles Treaty and emphasis on speedy rearmament¹⁴⁹. In spite of its vastly reduced fighting power after 1918, the *Reichswehr* leadership retained its privileged political position in the foreign policy decision-making process and the power to influence decisions, not only in its immediate jurisdiction but also in general political and economic issues. The anomalous situation of the post-1930 period offered opportunities to people like von Schleicher to express their political ambitions with the consent of the Presidency, thus enabling the *Reichswehr* leadership to play a decisive role both in the 1930-3 period, and in the compromise that brought Hitler to power in January 1933¹⁵⁰.

With regard to the diplomatic élite of the *Wilhelmstrasse*, the Weimar Republic was more of an interlude which did not affect the continuity of the Foreign Office's structures and attitudes. The *Wilhelmstrasse* bureaucracy drew its legitimacy not from any special constitutional link to the Head of State, as in Italy, but from its permanent character as a professional, non-partisan élite possessing an indisputable and unique expertise in foreign policy-making. This identification with the permanent structure of the German state insulated the Foreign Office from the disgrace of the Versailles Treaty which was almost exclusively debited to the Weimar politicians. Throughout the years of the Republic, the *Wilhelmstrasse* retained its traditional approach to foreign policy as a matter of professional, rather

¹⁴⁸ Geyer, M., "The Dynamics of Military Revisionism in the Interwar Years. Military Policy between Rearmament and Diplomacy", in Deist, W., (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa 1985), pp. 100-51, here pp. 111-3

¹⁴⁹ von Strandmann, H. P., "Imperialism and Revisionism in Interwar Germany", in Mommsen, W. J., Osterhammel, J. (eds.), *Imperialism and After. Continuities and Discontinuities* (London, Boston & Sydney 1986), pp. 93f; Geyer, "Etudes", pp. 109ff; "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 107-13;

¹⁵⁰ For the role of the *Reichswehr* leadership in the 1930-3 events see Carsten, pp. 338ff, and, especially for Schleicher, pp. 364ff; Hayes, P., "Kurt von Schleicher and Weimar Politics", *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), pp. 35-65; Koch, "Legality", pp. 48ff; Overly, R. J., "Hitler's War Plans and the German Economy", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M., (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London 1989), pp. 97-8

than public, jurisdiction. It also preserved its aristocratic composition in spite of the influx of new personnel in the early 1920s, mainly of bourgeois background. By the late 1920s the *Wilhelmstrasse* had successfully digested the newcomers, with the higher echelons of the Foreign Office remaining firmly in the hands of traditional officials¹⁵¹. The early attempts of the Republic to democratise the structures of German diplomacy had been abandoned in the face of more pressing problems for the very survival of the Republic. Although the diplomatic élite appeared to work together with Stresemann and Groener for a deal regarding disarmament, the commitment of the diplomats to the Republic's concept of peaceful revision was both half-hearted and ephemeral¹⁵². Long before Hitler came to power, the *Wilhelmstrasse* leadership, including the conservative Foreign Minister von Neurath, resented the burden of political accountability and the relative loss of political autonomy that this entailed¹⁵³. Instead, they were drawn to the platform of "minimum consensus", based on rearmament, use of military threat to achieve a unilateral revision of the Versailles Treaty, and an authoritarian system which could restore their primary influence upon foreign policy decision-making.

The third major difference between Germany and Italy in the interwar period stemmed from the dissimilar stage of economic development experienced by each country. In spite of a plethora of surviving non-modern aspects in the German state, the Weimar Republic was an advanced capitalist society. This meant that, albeit not a great power in military terms after 1918, Germany was still a *potential* great power in the political and economic sense of the word. In this sense, the economic capacity of the system for supporting rearmament was significantly higher than in Italy, thus

¹⁵¹ Seabury, P., *The Wilhelmstrasse. A study of German diplomats under the Nazi regime* (Berkeley 1954), pp. 18-21

¹⁵² Laffan, M., "Weimar and Versailles: German Foreign Policy, 1919-33", in Laffan, M. (ed.), *The Burden of German History, 1919-45. Essays for the Goethe Institute* (London 1989), pp. 81-102; Eley, G., "Conservatives and Radical Nationalists in Germany: the production of fascist potentials, 1912-1928", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives. The Radical Right and the Establishment in the twentieth century Europe* (London 1990), pp. 50-70; von Strandmann, "Imperialism and Revisionism", pp. 90ff;

¹⁵³ Heineman, J. L., *Hitler's First Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1979), pp. 59ff; Noakes, J., "German Conservatives and the Third Reich: an Ambiguous Relationship", in Blinkhorn, M. (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives. The Radical Right and the Establishment in the twentieth century Europe* (London 1990), pp. 71-97; Seabury, pp. 21-4. Also see von Neurath's relevant comment quoted in Rauschning, *Men of Chaos*, p. 172

underlining the importance of industrial élites in the foreign policy decision-making process. The support of heavy industry for an authoritarian system after 1930 contributed significantly to the endorsement of the "fascist solution". Apart from subsidising to an extent the NSDAP before 1933, sectors of the industrial élite played a much more crucial political role in the events leading to the *Machtübernahme*, through their rejection of the policies of Brüning and Schleicher, their acquiescence in the participation of the NSDAP in the government and their importance for the success of the rearmament programme sponsored by the *Reichswehr* and guaranteed by Hitler¹⁵⁴. Unlike in Italy, where foreign policy was traditionally based on great power diplomacy, prestige and a moderate use of the threat of force, the return of German foreign policy to concepts of unilateral revisionism did not rule out the actual use of force and thus established industry as a pivotal factor in rebuilding the country's military strength.

All these different factors dictated a fundamentally different approach to establishing a fascist state in Germany. For the Nazi leadership, an etatist model was neither available nor desirable as an option. For a start, the charismatic nature of Hitler's style of leadership, with its instinctive, mythical basis and its unsystematic approach to policy-making, could hardly be accommodated into the highly bureaucratised, rational structures of state administration¹⁵⁵. This discrepancy became obvious from the first moment with the lapse of the Reich cabinet, but reached a terminal point by 1938, when access to Hitler became totally unreliable, in defiance of any form of government protocol and procedure¹⁵⁶. Furthermore, Hitler's

¹⁵⁴ Geary, D., "The Industrial Elite and the Nazis in the Weimar Republic", in Stachura, P. D. (ed.), *The Nazi Machtergreifung* (London 1983), pp. 88ff; Turner, H. A. Jr., "Big Business and the Rise of Hitler", in *ibid.* (ed.), *Nazism and the Third Reich* (New York 1972), pp. 94ff; Stegmann, D., "Zum Verhältnis von Grossindustrie und Nationalsozialismus, 1930-33", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 13 (1972), pp. 399-482; Mason, "Primacy", pp. 170f

¹⁵⁵ Nyomarkay, J., *Charisma and Factionalism in the Nazi Party* (Minneapolis 1967), pp. 9ff; Kershaw, *Hitler-Myth*, pp. 11-148; Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945. A Documentary Reader*, vol. II: *State, Economy and Society, 1933-1939* (Exeter 1984), pp. 204f; Caplan, J., *Government without Administration. State and Civil Service in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Oxford 1988); Diehl-Thiele, P., *Partei und Staat im Dritten Reich. Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von NSDAP und allgemeiner innerer Staatsverwaltung, 1933-1945* (Munich 1971), pp. 21-4

¹⁵⁶ Heineman, pp. 72ff; Bracher, K. D., *Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung und Reichskonkordat: zum Frage des geschichtlichen Zusammenhangs und der politischen Verknüpfung von Reichskonkordat und Nationalsozialistischer Revolution* (Wiesbaden 1956), pp. 910ff; Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, vol. II: *1933-1945* (Newton Abbot 1973), pp. 193f

conception of the state as an ancillary - and not pivotal, as in Italy- institution of the Nazi system ruled out an identification between the state and the Nazi movement¹⁵⁷. His distrust of the elitist, pragmatic mentality of the state bureaucracies led him into a different state model, combining the totalitarian representation of the *Volk* by the party, the centrality of the armed forces for promoting national interest, and the charismatic authority of the leader as the only source of legitimacy in the system¹⁵⁸. In this sense, the consolidation of Nazi power entailed an institutional challenge to the autonomy and legitimacy of the state apparatus, but not the conquest of the state itself. It was rather operating on the basis of a "parallel state", using duplication of state functions by party agencies as a political laboratory for the production of new institutions to replace the existing state.

This "divide and rule" has been an item of heated historiographical dispute, as it is not entirely clear whether it was pursued intentionally by Hitler or resulted from administrative chaos and incompetence¹⁵⁹. In the field of diplomacy, the Nazi leadership accepted Hindenburg's condition of keeping Neurath as Foreign Minister and respecting the institutional autonomy of the *Wilhelmstrasse*. From the first moment, however, Hitler actively encouraged the creation of party agencies which claimed expertise in certain fields of foreign policy. The *Aussenpolitisches Amt* was established to institutionalise Rosenberg's aspirations to become the guru of Nazi foreign policy¹⁶⁰. In a similar fashion, Ribbentrop's *Dienststelle* gave expression to its founder's alternative concepts of foreign policy-making and became the vehicle for the consolidation of his personal influence over Hitler and the handling of foreign

¹⁵⁷ On Hitler's ideas about the state see Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf* (London 1972), pp. 402-10; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, II, pp. 201ff. For the Nazi theory of state see Diehl-Thiele, Ch. 1; Bendersky, J. W., *Carl Schmitt. Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton 1983)

¹⁵⁸ Noakes, "German Conservatives and the Third Reich", pp. 75, 86-7; Deist, *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 26f

¹⁵⁹ For the best discussion of the various historiographical approaches to the role of Hitler see Kershaw, I., *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London 1989, 2nd edition), Ch. 4. See also Bracher, K. D., "The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation", in Laqueur, W., *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 193-212

¹⁶⁰ Hauner, M., "The Professionals and the Amateurs in National Socialist Foreign Policy: Revolution and Subversion in the Islamic and Indian World", in Hirschfeld, G., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *Der 'Führerstaat'. Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart 1981), pp. 316ff; Jacobsen, H.-A., *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik 1933-1945* (Frankfurt 1968), pp. 90-160; Carr, W., "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", in Laqueur, W., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 122-4

affairs¹⁶¹. The creation of the *Auslandsorganisation* (AO) created a parallel channel of communication between party officials and Nazi organisations or sympathisers abroad, providing an alternative source of information about international political developments¹⁶². Finally, Hitler developed a preference similar to Mussolini's for personal diplomacy, using von Papen for Austria, Goering for dealings with Italy, Spain (economic issues) and the Nazi Party in Danzig, and later Ribbentrop for secret negotiations with London and the Sudeten Party in Czechoslovakia¹⁶³.

The operation of this multiple parallel mechanism reflects a deliberate strategy to undermine the authority of the *Wilhelmstrasse*, and this is attested to by Hitler's increasing reliance on the activities and advice of these agencies and special envoys at the expense of the diplomatic bureaucracy. Yet, the planning of this parallel mechanism was far from rational or successful. Rosenberg's disastrous trip to London in May 1933 reduced the influence of the APA to insignificant levels and led to a drastic cut in its funding by the party budget¹⁶⁴. Ribbentrop's initiatives as Ambassador in Britain caused frequent disappointment both to the Nazi leadership and to himself for the failure to impress upon the British the need for a German-British alliance¹⁶⁵. At the same time, expansion of the agencies did not entail effective political control over their activities. The July 1934 coup in Vienna was an eloquent indication of the Nazi leadership's inability to co-ordinate the secret initiatives of party organisations and ironically led to a temporary reliance on the professional advice of Neurath in the face of the party's lack of competence in

¹⁶¹ Michalka, W., "Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 165-72; Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik*, pp. 120ff; Broszat, M., *The Hitler State. The Foundation and Development of the internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London & New York 1981), pp. 296ff

¹⁶² Seabury, pp. 67f

¹⁶³ Carr, *Hitler*, pp. 30f, 51ff; Craig, G. A., "The German Foreign Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop", in Gilbert, F., Craig, G. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 427f; Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 278f; Heinemann, pp. 102-3, 119-20. For Goering's missions to Italy see Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 90f, 130ff; for his relations with Franco's regime see Leitz, C., *Economic Relations between Nazi Germany and Franco's Spain, 1936-1945* (Oxford 1996), pp. 59ff; and for von Papen, *ibid.*, pp. 195f, 236-7, 266-71

¹⁶⁴ Seabury, pp. 35ff

¹⁶⁵ Michalka, W., *Ribbentrop und die deutsche Weltpolitik 1933-1940. Aussenpolitische Konzeptionen und Entscheidungsprozesse im Dritten Reich* (Munich 1980), pp. 249ff; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism, III: Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (Exeter 1988), pp. 692-6

foreign affairs¹⁶⁶. The anarchic expansion of party activities caused a dual jurisdictional battle - between the party and the *Wilhelmstrasse*, and between the various party stars and agencies themselves. Rosenberg was happy to side even with Neurath against the prospect of Ribbentrop's appointment as State Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, while Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry kept antagonising Ribbentrop's Foreign Office over control of the flow of information from and to foreign countries¹⁶⁷. Hitler permitted the mushrooming of agencies but avoided unequivocal commitments to any particular one, because he was distrustful of any form of bureaucratisation of his charismatic power. In the end, his dealings regarding policy-making remained confined to the level of personal relations, but his allegiance to Rosenberg initially, then to Neurath, Ribbentrop and finally to Himmler did not reflect an endorsement of the institutions each of them headed. The result was an institutional chaos, with agencies and bureaucracies competing to provide the best interpretation of Hitler's vague intentions. Such an uncoordinated polycratic system did strengthen the *Fuehrer's* institutional role as supreme arbiter but did very little to formulate an alternative Nazi foreign policy mechanism which could carry out policies effectively¹⁶⁸.

With regard to the armed forces, their centrality in the Nazi concept of state dictated a very different approach. The crucial significance of rearmament for Nazi expansionist plans, and the acknowledgement that technical expertise and infrastructure were exclusive privileges of the armed forces, led to a close cooperation and consensus between the Nazi Party and the *Reichswehr* leaderships which lasted until 1937¹⁶⁹. Agreement on a more active revisionism eliminated frictions and left a large political space to the *Reichswehr* leaders to formulate military policy, reaping the benefits of the regime's priority of funding for rearmament. There were only two potential challenges to the primary authority of the armed forces. The first, the SA, became a bone of contention in early 1934, but

¹⁶⁶ For the July coup see Bracher, K. D., *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung. Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34* (Cologne 1960), pp. 939ff

¹⁶⁷ Heinemann, pp. 130-1; Kordt, E., *Nicht aus den Akten* (Stuttgart 1956), pp. 230f

¹⁶⁸ Bracher, K. D., "Stufen totalitärer Machtergreifung", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 4 (1956), pp. 30-42; and, for an overall assessment, Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 80-1; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, pp. 107-10

¹⁶⁹ Geyer, M., "Traditional Elites", pp. 61ff;

Hitler's growing irritation with Röhm's "revolutionary" rhetoric made the SA purge of June 1934 a less painful concession to *Reichswehr* demands for exclusive responsibility in military issues¹⁷⁰. The second challenge, the SS, represented a less obvious danger initially, officially confined to the role of safeguarding domestic order. The *Reichswehr*'s voluntary opt out from domestic affairs in 1933 rendered such a cohabitation feasible, but the implicit ambitions of the SS to become an élite military force of Nazi Germany were initially missed out by the traditional military leadership, allowing the SS space to flourish and eventually contest the authority of the army when the latter had lost most of its political authority¹⁷¹.

In many ways, the foreign policy initiatives of the Nazi regime between 1934 and 1936 were anticipated by this military planning. The introduction of conscription in 1935 was regarded by the military leadership as a *sine qua non* for attaining the division figures set for the expansion of the army in 1933 and 1934¹⁷². Also, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland was implicitly presupposed in Blomberg's plans for an effective defence policy against France. There was agreement between the Nazi and the *Reichswehr* leaderships that these two steps should be prioritised and taken when the situation permitted it. However, identity of goals did not mean identity of strategies or planning. Even at this early stage, views about the timing of these actions diverged. Hitler had initially planned the introduction of conscription for the autumn of 1935, a mere six months earlier than the *Reichswehr* leadership's estimates of the optimal date from a military point of view¹⁷³. Similarly, the sudden decision to remilitarise the Rhineland in March 1936 was the result of Hitler's astute

¹⁷⁰ Bracher, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung*, pp. 928ff; Geyer, "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 127ff; Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 49-51. See Röhm's criticism of the regime's tendency towards "normalisation" in Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 205-6. The SA projected the revolutionary image of the NSDAP [Fischer, C., "Ernst Julius Röhm: Chief of Staff of the SA and Indispensable [sic] Outsider", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 173-82]. For the purge see Messerschmidt, M., "Reichswehr und 'Röhm-Affäre'", *Militärhistorische Mitteilungen*, 3 (1986), pp. 107-44; *ibid.*, "Structure and Nature", pp. 146f; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 631ff, and vol. I: *The Rise to Power, 1919-1934* (Exeter 1983), pp. 167ff. For the significance of the SA purge for the internal structure of the party see Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 111ff

¹⁷¹ Wegner, B., "My Honour is Loyalty: the SS as a Military Factor in Hitler's Germany", in Deist (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, pp. 220-39

¹⁷² Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 38ff. See also, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IIb

¹⁷³ Müller, K.-J., *Das Heer und Hitler. Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime, 1933-1944* (Stuttgart 1956), pp. 206ff

opportunism, when he sensed that the Ethiopian crisis would impede the western Powers from actively opposing his unilateral violation of the Versailles Treaty. In fact, Hitler had no fixed thoughts regarding the timing of his major foreign policy initiatives - in the case of the Rhineland, he had not envisaged a favourable situation for remilitarisation before 1937 but seized opportunities offered by unforeseen international developments to promote a crucial goal of German revisionism much earlier and in the defiant, uncompromising style of a great power¹⁷⁴. However, the failure of the armed forces' leadership to curtail the increasing autonomy of the *Führer* in deciding when and how to implement commonly agreed policies undermined its political role in the foreign policy decision-making process in the long term.

The challenge to the political influence of the *Wilhelmstrasse* upon foreign policy decision-making was less subtle and more corrosive, originating from the Nazi leadership's deep-seated antipathy towards the diplomatic corps¹⁷⁵. Hitler maintained a pattern of smooth cooperation with Neurath personally and allowed him ample political space to deal with the pressing issues of German foreign policy, especially the negotiations for disarmament at Geneva¹⁷⁶. In spite of his previous efforts to achieve equality of status for Germany and a disarmament agreement amongst the Great Powers, Neurath endorsed Blomberg's argument in favour of withdrawal and played a crucial role in preparing Germany's simultaneous withdrawal from the League of Nations¹⁷⁷. However, this initial reliance on the professional expertise of Neurath did not entail an overall respect for the political autonomy of the *Wilhelmstrasse* in general. In Hitler's non-bureaucratic style of policy-making there was space for Neurath, partly because the latter was a personal choice of Hindenburg and partly because the *Führer* could rely on Neurath's accommodating attitude in the face of the lack of a reliable party candidate for the effective handling of foreign

¹⁷⁴ Michalka, W., (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 224ff (an excerpt of which is translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 725)

¹⁷⁵ Seabury, pp. 30-1. See also Goering's unflattering comments in *ibid.*, pp. 25-6; and Rosenberg's lack of respect for the bureaucrats of the Foreign Office in Seraphin, H. G., *Das Politische Tagesbuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/5 und 1939/40* (Göttingen, Berlin & Frankfurt 1956), p. 20

¹⁷⁶ Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 409ff; Heinemann, pp. Chs. 3-4

affairs¹⁷⁸. In the same way that the armed forces aspired to use Hitler as a legitimising factor for their unilateral initiatives on rearmament and revisionism, Hitler himself acknowledged Neurath's potential to reassure international public opinion about Germany's increasing activism in foreign affairs. Indeed, Neurath met these expectations during both the conscription and the Rhineland crises, providing accurate predictions about the reluctance or inability of the western powers to react and minimising the negative impact of German defiance of international agreements¹⁷⁹.

The assault, however, on the political autonomy of the Foreign Office by the Nazi leadership started soon afterwards and it did not spare Neurath. Even before Hindenburg's death there were alarming indications of Hitler's tendency to ignore not only the reports of the diplomats but even the counsel of his Foreign Minister. In January 1934 he concluded a Non-Aggression Pact with Poland, a move which appalled Neurath and caused shock to the traditional diplomats as it seemed to thwart the utmost goal of German revisionism, i.e. the return of the Polish Corridor to the Reich¹⁸⁰. The July 1934 coup in Vienna was another alarming indication of the uncontrolled meddling of Nazi groups in foreign policy decision-making. Although Neurath was under the impression that he had committed Hitler to a peaceful course of action towards Austria, plans for a military coup against Dollfuss were secretly promoted by the Austrian National Socialist party with the agreement of the *Führer*. The Foreign Office was aware of the subversive activities of party members in Austria but Neurath seemed to have overestimated both the firmness of Hitler's conversion to a peaceful solution of the Austria problem and his capacity to control a chaotic party mechanism in Germany and abroad¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ Wollstein, G., *Von Weimarer Revisionismus zu Hitler. Das deutsche Reich und die Grossmächte in der Anfangsphase der nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in Deutschland* (Bonn, Bad Godesberg 1973), pp. 96ff

¹⁷⁸ Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 406-9, 425

¹⁷⁹ Heinemann, pp. 110ff. For Neurath's diplomatic reports and advice during the period of the conscription crisis and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland see, amongst others, DGFP, C, 4, 574 (Memorandum, 22 February 1936)

¹⁸⁰ The significance of the pact is discussed in more detail in Ch. 4, Section IIb

¹⁸¹ Heinemann, pp. 103f; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 194-6. That the Foreign Office was aware of subversive actions organised by the Austrian Nazi Party is evident in DGFP, C, 1, 207 (Köpke report, 23 March 1933)

The introduction of conscription resulted from another sudden decision made by Hitler, in the company not of Blomberg or Neurath, but of Ribbentrop, and was then announced to the Defence and Foreign Ministers as a *fait accompli*. As with the case of Blomberg, Neurath's reservations concerned the timing and the danger of negative repercussions, but he accepted the inevitable and worked conscientiously to minimise the damage to German relations with the western powers. However, he also awoke to the realisation that his initial underestimation of Ribbentrop's potential was imprudent¹⁸². Neurath had shown a certain willingness to establish constructive relations with the Nazi élites - in 1933 he informed the *Wilhelmstrasse* officials that they could join the party if they so wished. Yet, on a personal basis, Ribbentrop's consolidation through the establishment of his *Dienststelle* (summer 1934) and his increasing tendency to assume responsibilities without informing the Foreign Office was a step too far¹⁸³. From 1935 onwards, Neurath used his privilege of having regular access to Hitler in order, first, to oppose Ribbentrop's ambitions to replace Bülow as State Secretary to the Foreign Ministry and, second, to make Ribbentrop's actions contingent upon the prior approval of the *Wilhelmstrasse*. He was fighting a losing battle, though. Ribbentrop's successful conclusion of the British-German Naval Agreement in the summer of 1935 enhanced his political leverage in the eyes of Hitler¹⁸⁴. At the same time, Neurath's allies in the Foreign Office were becoming more scarce, not because of any extensive nazification of German diplomatic and administrative personnel (the *Wilhelmstrasse* was still regarded by the party as a "nest of conspirators" with only limited National Socialist representation amongst its ranks), but due to a natural combination of retirement and death. Filling the vacancies proved a formidable task for Neurath, because from 1935 Hitler had made personnel appointments subject to the approval of the *Politische Organisation* of the party¹⁸⁵.

Neurath, however, could still claim victories. The decision to remilitarise the Rhineland unilaterally contradicted the Foreign Minister's previous policy of a

¹⁸² Heinemann, pp. 134ff

¹⁸³ Seabury, pp. 46ff; Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 422f; Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 296f

¹⁸⁴ Weinberg, G. L., "Hitler and England, 1933-1945: Pretense and Reality", *German Studies Review*, 8 (1995), pp. 299-309; Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 76ff. For the negotiations and the text of the agreement see DGFP, C, 4, 132/240

¹⁸⁵ Carr, *Arms, Autarky and Aggression*, pp. 27-9; Orlow, II, pp. 178f; Heinemann, pp. 138-42

negotiated solution, but at least Neurath was present at the conference at which the decision was after some discussion taken¹⁸⁶. Again, he did not ultimately oppose the move, convinced that no danger of military reaction existed at the time of the Ethiopian crisis¹⁸⁷. He was definitely happy to be the Foreign Minister who had freed Germany from all the onerous restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. A few months later, the death of Bülow refuelled the bitter struggle between Neurath and Ribbentrop, as the latter restated his claim for the post of the State Secretary. Neurath was still in a position to carry the day with Hitler and avert the prospect of Ribbentrop's appointment even by threatening to resign¹⁸⁸. His eventual choice, his son-in-law von Mackensen, came as a relief to the traditional diplomats but also underlined the scarcity of Neurath's available choices for filling the vacant places and the increasing influence of factors outside the *Wilhelmstrasse* upon the personnel policy of the Foreign Office.

Growing autonomy and self-confident (1936-37)

Thus we arrive at the Spanish Civil War. The background to Germany's involvement exposed the extent to which gradual, subtle changes in the foreign policy decision-making process in the previous three years had resulted in a cumulative strengthening of Hitler's personal power at the expense of the traditional élite groups. The crucial role of the NSDAP's *Auslandsorganisation* (AO) in dealing with both diplomatic and military issues of Germany's intervention has been established by the historiography on the Spanish Civil War¹⁸⁹, as has Goering's personal influence and pressure to intervene in order to benefit from Spain's rich raw

¹⁸⁶ Kettenacker, L., in Douglas, R. (ed.), *1939. A Retrospect Forty Years After* (London 1983), p. 28; Heineman, pp. 90f; Brüning, H., *Memoiren 1918-1934*, vol. I (Munich 1972), p. 203; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 678ff; Parker, R. A. C., "The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936", *World Politics*, 4 (1951), pp. 355-73; Schuker, S. A., "France and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, 1936", in Finney, P. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London & New York 1997), pp. 222-44

¹⁸⁷ See his comments in DGFP, C, 5, 33

¹⁸⁸ Heinemann, pp. 142f; Seabury, pp. 53-4, 60ff; Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 425-6

¹⁸⁹ Abendroth, H.-H., "Deutschlands Rolle im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 472-7; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 287f.

material resources¹⁹⁰. From the beginning, Neurath vehemently opposed any degree of involvement in the war or co-ordination with Italy for joint diplomatic-military action, while Ribbentrop pressed Hitler to accept Franco's and the AO's suggestions for a large-scale military intervention¹⁹¹. In this chaos of conflicting jurisdictions and policies, the role of Hitler as the ultimate initiator of policy was *de facto* acknowledged. Access to him became the most crucial and effective method of influencing policy-making. The AO envoys succeeded in explaining their case in favour of military involvement at a meeting with Hitler at Bayreuth, with both Goering and Goebbels endorsing the expediency of this course of action¹⁹². Obviously, this meant that the Foreign Office had lost not just its political primacy in foreign affairs but also the privilege of co-decision. In this sense, Neurath's relative success in curtailing the extent of German involvement in Spain and in minimising the reaction to the bombing of the battleship "Leipzig" later in 1936 (against the initial wishes of the Nazi leadership for large-scale military retaliation) should be placed into perspective¹⁹³. In this case, Neurath had failed to initiate or pursue a policy compatible with the objectives of German traditional diplomacy. He was excluded from consultations and only managed to intervene belatedly to alter practicalities, not the framework of the policy itself. His success owed almost everything to his personal relationship to Hitler and the considerable access to him which he still enjoyed; it did not reflect acceptance of any procedural obligation on Hitler's part to consult or inform the Foreign Office. So long as Neurath had Hitler's ear, the Foreign Office could exercise some influence on foreign policy decision-making through him. If Neurath's access was curtailed by Hitler himself, then the whole German diplomatic service would be automatically cut off from decision-making.

¹⁹⁰ Leitz, pp. 92ff; Schieder, W., "Spanischer Bürgerkrieg und Vierjahresplan. Zur Struktur der nationalsozialistischen Aussenpolitik", in Michalka, W. (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik* (Darmstadt 1978), pp. 325-59; Abendroth, pp. 478f; Overy, R. J., *Göring: The 'Iron Man'* (London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley 1984), pp. 44-5

¹⁹¹ For the diplomatic background see Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 285ff; Heinemann, pp. 149ff. For the *Wilhelmstrasse*'s opposition see Carr, W., *Arms, Autarky and Aggression. A Study in German Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (London 1972), pp. 66ff

¹⁹² Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 428f; DGFP, D, 3, 1-2

¹⁹³ DGFP, D, 3, 267

The events until the so-called Hossbach conference (November 1937) confirmed the precarious position of both diplomatic and military élites, and their gradual relegation to a near-functional institutional status. For the armed forces' leadership, the gathering pace of Nazi aggression and independence in foreign policy-making was a cause for alarm but did not result in any serious discussion of the long-term implications of the increasing rearmament programme. The *Wehrmacht* leadership was so absorbed in the practicalities of meeting increased targets of mobilisation in a shorter time-scale that they paid little attention to the goals that such a formidable military machine could serve¹⁹⁴. There was still a high degree of agreement on the priorities of German foreign policy: Austria and Czechoslovakia were obvious targets, both in irredentist terms and for their importance in solving the labour and raw materials problems of German rearmament¹⁹⁵. Yet, the implications of the offensive nature of military planning, entailing a higher risk of confrontation with Britain, were not taken at face value by the military leadership until the end of 1937. War as an option was not rejected altogether but General Beck, Chief Commander of the Army Staff, understood it in a fundamentally different way - only against France, possibly over Czechoslovakia which was a legitimate target of German expansion, but not before 1943, when the targets of the August 1936 programme of rearmament would have been attained¹⁹⁶.

If the armed forces' leadership could still entertain an illusion of control over decision-making, the Foreign Office had by 1937 given up most of its hopes. Hitler's tendency to bypass the *Wilhelmstrasse* increased, as did his reliance on the advice mainly of Ribbentrop and Goering. By implication, Neurath's access to the Nazi leadership was gradually curtailed, leading to the marginalisation of the institutional

¹⁹⁴ Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 40ff; Geyer, "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 131ff; O'Neill, R. J., *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939* (London 1966), pp. 101ff

¹⁹⁵ Deist *et al.*, "Causes and Preconditions", pp. 348ff; Mason, T., "The Primacy of Politics - Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany", in Woolf, S. J. (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1968), pp. 179f

¹⁹⁶ Müller, K.-J., *General Ludwig Beck. Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabchefs des deutschen Heers 1933-1938* (Boppard 1980), pp. 351ff, 447ff, 469ff; and "Ludwig Beck. Ein General zwischen Wilhelminismus und Nationalsozialismus", in Geiss, I., Wendt, B.-J. (eds.), *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Düsseldorf 1974), pp. 513-28; Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 86ff; Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 135ff

position of the whole *Wilhelmstrasse*. The German-Austrian Gentlemen's Agreement was signed without even consulting the Foreign Office, while Ribbentrop elicited Hitler's permission to negotiate a tripartite agreement with Italy and Japan without the prior knowledge and against the wishes of Neurath who dreaded the anti-British implications of such a pact¹⁹⁷. The prospect of concluding such a pact, and the consolidation of the Axis alliance, convinced not only Neurath but also other prominent non-Nazi figures of the government - such as the Minister of Economics, Schacht, who resigned in the autumn of 1937¹⁹⁸ - that the aggressive tone of Nazi foreign policy marked a qualitative departure from traditional principles and entailed a high risk of conflict with the western powers. The fatalism with which the Foreign Minister viewed these developments, his frequent resignations and decreasing willingness to intervene as he had done in the past, were symptomatic of an awareness that political influence had eluded the *Wilhelmstrasse*¹⁹⁹. The Foreign Office might have succeeded in insulating its ranks from the intrusion of undesired figures (Ribbentrop, for example) until 1938, but the parasitic Nazi system allowed ample political space to Ribbentrop, Goering and Goebbels to use their direct access to Hitler in order to eclipse the political role of the traditional diplomatic group in the decision-making process.

In this sense, the Hossbach conference had a limited importance as an overall programmatic statement, but was a catalyst in reflecting deep changes in the way foreign policy decisions were taken in the Nazi system, and in alluding to even more radical intentions for the near future. The prioritisation of Austria and Czechoslovakia as targets of Nazi expansion were not a real shock to the participants (Neurath, Blomberg, Fritsch, Raeder, Goering), because the former was regarded as a legitimate objective of German irredentism and the latter had fared prominently in the military planning of the *Wehrmacht* for German defence. Also, there was a reassuring commitment to a significantly later date - optimal conditions for actions

¹⁹⁷ Heinemann, pp. 153ff; Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 431-3. For the negotiations and the agreement see DGFP, C, 5, 554 (Neurath to Hitler, 25 September 1936)

¹⁹⁸ On Schacht's failure to persuade Hitler and on his eventual resignation see various contributions in Forstmeier, F., Volkman, H.-E. (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf 1975)

¹⁹⁹ Rauschnig, *Men of Chaos*, pp. 70ff; Seabury, pp. 35ff, 40f

were expected in 1943. The difference lay in the choice of means and strategy. Instead of an evolutionary approach to *Anschluss* and a defensive plan against a possible attack by France and/or Czechoslovakia, Hitler's exposition was based on an offensive action and on exploiting a "favourable situation which would not occur again" in terms of Germany's military advantage. The strategic prerequisites for this favourable solution were fairly absurd: civil war in France or a French-British-Italian war in the Mediterranean as a result of tension in Spain. However, the other importance of Hitler's account at the Hossbach conference regarded his inclusion of Britain in the camp of Germany's possible enemies, along with France. Here, the influence of Ribbentrop's anti-British rhetoric upon Hitler's medium-term strategy becomes evident; in particular the allusions to a parallel action by Japan in the Far East and by Italy in the Mediterranean against British colonies echoed Ribbentrop's ongoing efforts for a tripartite alliance against the interests of the British empire²⁰⁰.

The increased danger of a conflict with Britain alarmed the traditional military and diplomatic leaderships. Both Blomberg and Fritsch expressed strong reservations during the conference, while Neurath was mobilised after the discussion to seek the cooperation of the military in arresting Hitler's aggressive intentions²⁰¹. However, the extent of reaction by the traditional military and diplomatic élites after the Hossbach conference can only partly be explained by these programmatic divergences. What mainly raised the stakes of opposition was the realisation that foreign policy decisions, even of such grave importance, were now taken by Hitler without even prior consultation with the *Wehrmacht* leadership or the diplomats about the practical aspects or the feasibility of his plans. Neurath had been more accustomed to this sort of marginalisation since 1936; but Fritsch, for example, who had struggled to check the influence of the Nazi party over the army, awoke to the realisation that rearmament and offensive military planning had reduced policy options to either war in the near future or peace by actively opposing Hitler's

²⁰⁰ For the text of the Hossbach Memorandum see DGFP, D, 1, 19. See also the document reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp., 680-7. For an analysis see Meinck, G., *Hitler und die deutsche Aufrüstung* (Wiesbaden 1959). See also, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IV

²⁰¹ Müller, K.-J., "The Structure and Nature of the National Conservative Opposition in Germany up to 1940", in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London 1985), pp. 151ff; and his "The German Military Opposition before the Second World War", in Mommsen, W. J., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983), pp. 65-75

strategy²⁰². The defiant manner in which the *Führer* drafted and announced his plans, "rejecting the idea of discussion before the wider circle of the Reich cabinet", amounted to a *de facto* relegation of the military and diplomatic leaderships to the function of simply executing his programme. This places the function of the Hossbach conference in a different perspective. Hitler did not intend the discussion to be interactive - his intentions regarding Austria and Czechoslovakia were fixed and co-decision was not part of his style of leadership. Instead, he used the occasion to test the participants' willingness to accept their institutional subordination to his primary, exclusive jurisdiction and to act as a-political functionaries of a leader-oriented system²⁰³.

In this sense, the dismissal of Fritsch, Blomberg and Neurath early in 1938 reflected Hitler's realisation that traditional figures had become a liability for Nazi foreign policy²⁰⁴. It also showed a peak of self-confidence for his instinctive leadership and his trust in the new generation of officials who were chosen to replace the old military and diplomatic guard. Ribbentrop had long before been a Foreign Minister-in-waiting. His exclusive responsibility for the secret German-Czech negotiations in 1936-37 and for the conclusion of the tripartite agreement with Italy and Japan were major initiatives without any involvement of the Foreign Office. In the armed forces, Hitler demonstrated his determination to control even the military planning of the *Wehrmacht* by taking over Blomberg's post as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. At the same time, Brauchitsch, the new Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Keitel, head of the newly established *Wehrmacht* High Command (OKW), were more sympathetic to Hitler's aggressive policy and in any case represented a new technocratic, non-political attitude to policy-making that

²⁰² Hossbach, F., *Zwischen Wehrmacht und Hitler, 1934-1938* (Wolfenbüttel & Hannover 1949), pp. 68ff; Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 71ff; Deutsch, K., *Hitler and his Generals. The Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938* (Minneapolis 1974), pp. 71-5; Carr, "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", pp. 141f

²⁰³ Geyer, "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 142-4

²⁰⁴ For the Blomberg-Fritsch affair see the exhaustive analysis in Deutsch, *Hitler and his Generals*, pp. 78-215. See also Craig, G. A., *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (London 1966), pp. 489ff; Deutsch, H. C., *Das Komplott oder die Entmachtung der Generale. Blomberg- und Fritsch-Krise. Hitlers Weg zum Krieg* (Zurich 1974)

facilitated the *Führer's* plans to separate the political from the functional aspects of military and foreign policy²⁰⁵.

The triumph of the Nazi leadership: a different system of foreign policy decision-making (1938-39)

The *Anschluss* in March 1938 was the first major achievement of the new Nazi style of foreign policy, but it does not offer the best example of how this new decision-making mechanism would operate. The reason was that the dramatic events leading to the incorporation of Austria into the Reich were precipitated by Schuschnigg's arbitrary decision to break his agreement with Hitler and call a plebiscite. The crisis caught the Nazi leadership unawares to the extent that the new Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, was in London throughout the time of the *Anschluss*²⁰⁶. The successful handling of the crisis was the result of Goering's autonomous role in dealing with Seyss-Inquart in Vienna and, ironically, of Neurath's professional advice and weight. Neurath offered his services to Hitler in the absence of the Foreign Minister and, although he did not succeed in committing him to a non-invasion policy, he correctly predicted that no serious international repercussions should be expected²⁰⁷.

It was the Czech crisis of the summer and autumn of 1938 that illustrated the new division of labour between political, diplomatic and military groups in the Nazi system. Hitler's "unalterable decision to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future" was translated into a military plan by the new *Wehrmacht* leadership²⁰⁸. The only remaining bastion of the old military guard, General Beck, Chief of the General Staff since 1933, resorted to a last-ditch attempt to change the

²⁰⁵ Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 263-4; Carr, "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", pp. 142-3

²⁰⁶ Seabury, pp. 65ff; Schwarz, P., *This Man Ribbentrop: His Life and Times* (New York 1943), pp. 234-5; "Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister", in Smelser, R., Zitellmann, R (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 168f

²⁰⁷ Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago 1980), pp. 170ff. Goering's role is documented in DGFP, D, 1, 352 (Hitler's letter to Mussolini, 11 March 1938). For Neurath's position and contribution see Heinemann, pp. 170f

²⁰⁸ DGFP, D, 2, Enclosure to Doc. 221 (Directive for "Operation Green"). For the Czech crisis see also, in this study, Ch. 4, Sections II and IVc

course of German foreign policy by fighting against party involvement in the decision-making process²⁰⁹. Since the Hossbach conference General Beck had endeavoured to bring traditional military figures (Fritsch, Blomberg) into a political movement that could express the strong opposition of prominent political, diplomatic and military circles to the prospect of Germany's involvement in a major war²¹⁰. Notwithstanding the purge of the military leadership, Beck continued to fight against the warlike implications of the *Führer's* new aggressive policy. During the Czech crisis, his reservations were shared not only by conservative figures like Neurath, Schwerin von Krosigk and Weizsäcker, but also by Goering and Hitler's adjutant Wiedemann²¹¹. Interestingly, even Beck's vehement criticism excluded the person of Hitler, whose right to primary authority in the decision-making process was not questioned²¹². The main targets were party appointees and members, both in the armed forces and the Foreign Office, who had surrounded the *Führer* and alienated him from his professional experts. Hitler, however, could afford to discard Beck's protests now that he had the backing of the new military leadership for the execution of his plans. The resignation of Beck in the midst of the Sudeten crisis underlined the complete failure of the traditional élites to reinstate a degree of control over the foreign policy decision-making process²¹³.

At the same time, Ribbentrop seized the opportunity offered by the Czech crisis for diplomatic activity in order to reassert his authority after his exclusion during the *Anschluss*. He played a significant role in reinforcing Hitler's aggressive intentions towards Czechoslovakia. He, like his leader, seems to have believed that Britain and France would not risk a major confrontation for the sake of

²⁰⁹ On Beck's opposition see Müller, *Beck*, pp. 555ff; *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 301-331, 650ff; "Structure and Nature of the National Conservative Opposition", pp. 157ff; Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 136-43; Deutsch, *Hitler and his Generals*, pp. 11ff

²¹⁰ Geyer, "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 141ff; Heinemann, pp. 163-4; Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 302-5, 309-13; *Beck*, pp. 272ff; Noakes, "German Conservatives and the Third Reich", pp. 87ff

²¹¹ Heinemann, pp. 174ff; Wiedemann, F., *Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte* (Kettwig 1964), pp. 127ff

²¹² Note his relevant comments in Müller, *Beck*, pp. 555ff

²¹³ Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 317-33; "Structure and Nature of the National Conservative Opposition", pp. 169-78; Hoffmann, P., *Widerstand, Staatsstreich, Attentat. Der Kampf der Opposition gegen Hitler* (Munich 1979), Ch. 4

Czechoslovakia²¹⁴, but he was prepared to follow an "unwavering attitude" that could lead to a "major war with the western powers"²¹⁵. Ribbentrop had since 1936 been convinced that a German-British conflict would be inevitable, because "Britain does not want a powerful Germany", and he pressed for an uncompromising line against the efforts of Halifax, Henderson and, later, Chamberlain to promote a peaceful solution²¹⁶. Many conservative diplomats, including the State Secretary to the Foreign Ministry von Weizsäcker, had strong reservations about Ribbentrop's aggressive foreign policy ideas and reckless style but were not willing to express their opposition or to act against the wishes of their chief²¹⁷. In some ways, they had been content with the appointment of Ribbentrop to the position of Foreign Minister as his high profile with Hitler was expected to result in an improvement of the *Wilhelmstrasse's* status in the decision-making process after the last years of inactivity and marginalisation. Initially, Ribbentrop had chosen to rely on the existing professional personnel of the Foreign Office in his struggle against Goebbels and Goering over jurisdictional issues²¹⁸. When von Mackensen resigned, Ribbentrop's proposed the conservative Ernst von Weizsäcker for the post of State Secretary - an unlikely choice by the star of Nazi diplomacy for an allegedly fascistised Foreign Office²¹⁹. Gradually from 1939 onwards, however, he marginalised the traditional groups by transferring personnel from his *Dienststelle* to key positions of the Foreign Office (like Martin Luther and Paul Karl Schmidt)²²⁰. He also initiated a process of administrative reform within the Office with two clear

²¹⁴ Michalka, W. (ed.), (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 245f

²¹⁵ Seabury, pp. 93-4

²¹⁶ Ribbentrop's 1936 comments may be found in Michalka (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, I, pp. 246; *Ribbentrop*, pp. 249ff. For his subsequent policy initiatives towards Britain see Michalka, "Conflicts within the German Leadership on the Objectives and Tactics of German Foreign Policy, 1933-1939", in Mommsen, W. J., Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983), pp. 53f; "Joachim von Ribbentrop", pp. 167f; "From Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop's Alternative Concept to Hitler's Foreign Policy Programme", in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 267-84

²¹⁷ For von Weizsäcker's opposition see DGFP, D, 1, 86 (Memorandum, 20 December 1937); Hill, L. (ed.), *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere, 1933-1950* (Frankfurt 1974), pp. 130ff; and Michalka, "Structure and Nature of the National Conservative Opposition", pp. 160-70, for an analysis.

²¹⁸ Seabury, pp. 58ff

²¹⁹ Michalka, "Joachim von Ribbentrop", pp. 168-9

aims. The first was to create new bodies with enhanced responsibilities (like the Agency for News Analysis) in order to strengthen the *Wilhelmstrasse* position in its jurisdictional battle with the Ministry of Propaganda. The second was to instigate a process of creating a Ribbentrop Foreign Office within the Foreign Office, in other words a small diplomatic élite comprising Ribbentrop's closest allies which would operate as the power-base of Ribbentrop's personal diplomacy during the war years²²¹.

The period from the Munich Agreement to the invasion of Poland offers ample confirmation of this decision-making pattern. The armed forces' leadership dutifully provided military plans to execute Hitler's plans regarding the liquidation of the rump state of Czechoslovakia in March 1939²²². Brauchitsch committed himself to a speedier indoctrination of the *Wehrmacht*, something that even Blomberg had been very careful about²²³. With the resignation of Beck there was nobody in the forces to express the traditional army aspiration for co-decision-making in military planning. The *Wehrmacht* had reached formidable levels of fighting power, mobilisation and technological excellence - but it had also been reduced to a technocratic agency assigned to making political directives by the Nazi leadership practically feasible. The revision of the whole rearmament programme in 1938 with the so-called *Schnellplan* reflected a much earlier target for military preparedness, brought forward to 1939-40 as opposed to the 1943-45 date used at the Hossbach conference²²⁴. At the same time, the introduction of the Z-Plan for naval rearmament highlighted a deep change in the strategic assumptions of the Nazi leadership - war against Britain was becoming increasingly more probable, despite Hitler's desire to

²²⁰ Seabury, pp. 60-1, 71-7

²²¹ Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 297-9

²²² DGFP, D, 4, 202 (Report of a conversation between Hitler and Tiso, 13 March 1939)

²²³ Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 139-41; Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 263ff; Berghahn, V. R., "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung' der Wehrmacht, 1939-1943", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 17 (1969), pp. 17-71

²²⁴ For the importance and the effectiveness of the *Schnellplan* see Murray, W., *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939. The Path to Ruin* (Princeton 1984), pp. 24-5; Hancock, E., *The National Socialist Leadership and Total War, 1941-5* (New York 1991), pp. 16f

avoid it and his hopes that it could be averted even after the invasion of Poland²²⁵. For his part, Ribbentrop played a crucial role in producing a dramatic *volte-face* in European diplomacy that proved a catalyst for the decision to launch war in September 1939. The conclusion of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939 attained the strategic prerequisite for Hitler's aim to avoid a two-front war²²⁶. Germany embarked on war with a foreign policy-making mechanism that confirmed the triumph of the autocratic, leader-oriented tendencies of the Nazi system. Power emanated from, and rested in, Hitler and those who were given the privilege of having access to him, providing plausible strategies for implementing their leader's ideas. The removal of decision-making responsibility from those involved in the execution of policy was by now complete.

IV. Fascist parties and leaderships: totalitarianism versus authoritarianism

Against the backdrop of authoritarianism, epitomised in the cult of the *Duce* and in the *Führerprinzip*, the fascist parties represented an alternative source of power which was both instrumental for fascist consolidation and problematic for a leader-oriented regime. The PNF and the NSDAP sponsored a *totalitarian* conception of domestic life, a system in which the party would replace the state as the highest form of representing the nation and would thus raise claim to the totality and exclusivity of such a representation²²⁷. In the first years of their existence, the two parties maintained an identity between movement and leader, in the sense that the position of the latter depended upon the collective will of the party membership.

²²⁵ Deist, *Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, pp. 60ff; Dülffer, J., *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine. Reichspolitik und Flottenbau, 1920 bis 1939* (Düsseldorf 1973), pp. 501ff. See also a collection of relevant documents in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 728-30

²²⁶ For a detailed analysis of these issues see, in this study, Ch. 6, Section II

²²⁷ Pombeni, "La forma partito", pp. 219-64. For the conception of party as a crucial device of "totalitarian" regimes see Friedrich, C. J., "The Unique Character of Totalitarian Society", in Friedrich, C. J. (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (Cambridge Mass. 1954), pp. 47-60

Mussolini's resignation in 1920 after criticisms for his role in the Pacification Pact with the Socialists underlined the PNF's relative autonomy from its leadership which was not as yet regarded as permanent and unquestionable²²⁸. In Germany, until the late 1920s, Hitler's leadership was still an item of criticism, especially by the so-called "left-wing" revolutionary members of the NSDAP who saw the growing authoritarian tendencies of the *Führer* as a negation of the collective character of the party²²⁹. The crisis came to a head in 1930, with Otto Strasser openly criticising Hitler for using the leadership principle to ban intra-party debate on ideological issues²³⁰.

The gap between leader and party increased in the last years before the acquisition of power. Mussolini's and Hitler's success in claiming to represent the whole parties and their ability to centralise authority over their supporters seemed to confirm the authoritarian model of leadership at the expense of the initial egalitarian and collective character of the movements. Even then, however, party officials aspired to a high degree of power-sharing with the leadership in a future fascist system, something that was an anathema to the traditional élites who had acquiesced in the "fascist experiment" on the explicit understanding that this would involve the separation of the parties from the allegedly responsible leaders²³¹. Thus, with their appointment as head of coalition governments, Mussolini and Hitler faced a complex dilemma - how not to thwart their parties' totalitarian aspirations and reward the support of the old fighters without jeopardising their own positions of authority or

²²⁸ The identification of fascism with Mussolini is advocated by Finer, H., *Mussolini's Italy* (Hamden, Connecticut 1964, 2nd ed.), p. 161. This identification dates back to 1921, in the aftermath of the crisis related to the Pacification Pact with the Socialists [Gentile, E., *Storia del Partito Fascista, 1919-1922: Movimento e milizia* (Rome & Bari 1989), pp. 247ff]. The problems that arose from the plans for a Pacification Pact with the Socialists are discussed in Gentile, *Storia del Partito Fascista*, pp. 257ff; Giurati, G., *La parabola di Mussolini nelle memorie di un gerarca*, ed. by E. Gentile (Rome & Bari 1981), pp. 92f.

²²⁹ Carr, *Hitler*, pp. 15-27; Mommsen, H., "National Socialism: Continuity and Change", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (London 1979), pp. 158f; Plewinid, M., *Hitler. Der völkische Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen 1970), pp. 85f

²³⁰ Strasser, O., *Hitler and I* (London 1940), pp. 108ff

²³¹ Andreski, S., "Fascists as Moderates", in Larsen, S. U., Hagtvét, B., Myklebust, J. P. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo, Tromsø 1980), pp. 52-5; Faye, J. P., *Langages totalitaires. Critique de la raison/ l'économie narrative* (Paris 1972), pp. 407ff. See also the analysis of Faye's arguments in Thompson, J. B., *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, pp. 211-27

offending the sensibilities of the traditional élites whose consent was pivotal for retaining power.

Italy: *mussolinismo* and the de-politicisation of the PNF

The complexity of the problem of how to deal with the party was different in each country. In Italy, the short period of Fascist incubation did not allow sufficient time for the crystallisation of the PNF's definite ideological character or the centralisation of Mussolini's power²³². After the March on Rome, the party suffered from multiple political confusion and incompatible expectations. Moderates, such as Grandi, and many members of the ANI favoured the total integration of the party into the state structure and dismissed radical calls for an "anti-state" function of the party²³³. The National Syndicalists, headed by Rossoni, rejected etatism, sponsoring instead plans for a radical reorganisation of Italian society on the basis of syndicalist corporatism²³⁴. Extremists, such as Farinacci and Malaparte, were against the idea of a strong state and advocated a totalitarian rule of the party through dictatorship and removal of all institutional limitations on Fascist power²³⁵. Farinacci, in particular, described the party as the only authentic expression of the spirit of fascism, a reminder of its agrarian, provincial roots and of the dynamics of *squadrismo*²³⁶. Most members of the old guard were also extremely critical of newcomers to the PNF,

²³² Germino, D. L., *The Italian Fascist Party in Power. A Study in Totalitarian Rule* (New York 1971), pp. 133-9; Sarti, "Italian Fascism", pp. 14-30

²³³ See Gentile, E., *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, 1918-1925* (Roma & Bari 1975), Ch. 5; Germino, pp. 19f; Payne, S., *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison 1995), pp. 111-2

²³⁴ On the ideology of national syndicalism see Gentile, *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 76-90; Sarti, "Italian Fascism", pp. 22f; Sternhell, Z., "Fascist Ideology", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 345ff; *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton 1994), Chs. 3-4; Schwarzenberg, C., *Il sindacalismo fascista* (Milan 1972); Payne, *History of Fascism*, p. 112

²³⁵ For review of the different groups within the PNF see Payne, *History of Fascism*, pp. 110-3; Germino, pp. 83-104. See also in general De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. I: *La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin 1966). See also Gentile, E., *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, 1918-1925* (Roma & Bari 1975), passim, where an interesting attempt at self-classification (Volt, "Le cinque anime del fascismo", *Critica Fascista*, 15 February 1925), is reprinted (pp. 454-8).

²³⁶ Farinacci, R., *Un periodo aureo del Partito Nazionale Fascista* (Foligno 1927), pp. 155-60. For an analysis of Farinacci's views see Gentile, *Ideologia fascista*, pp. 263-76; Hamilton, pp. 54-6

whose motives they distrusted, advocating instead their expulsion and the blocking of further "opportunistic" inflows of new members²³⁷. Tensions surfaced very early, especially in the field of appointments, where the so-called "Fascists of the first hour" felt they had been sidelined in favour of sympathetic traditional figures or "newcomers", i.e. members who joined the PNF after the March on Rome²³⁸. However, the tension reached a critical point during the Matteotti crisis which lasted for more than six months. The mobilisation of the extremists, their pressure on Mussolini for a "second wave" of fascistisation during the Matteotti crisis, and the threat from local Fascist organisations not to obey the *Duce* if he did not assume dictatorial powers and separate the party from the state, contributed to the decision to establish the dictatorship in January 1925²³⁹.

The appointment of Farinacci as Party Secretary signalled a victory for the intransigents, but it was an ephemeral one. The dictatorship had strengthened the authoritarian, leader-oriented character of the Fascist system without in reality rewarding the party as an institution of the Fascist regime with increased political influence in the decision-making process²⁴⁰. Faced with a clash between Farinacci and the Minister of the Interior Federzoni over the status of the militia, the *Duce* did not hesitate to dismiss the former, endorse the statist approach of the latter and minimise the role of the *squadri*²⁴¹. In the same vein, the institutionalisation of the Grand Council as the highest organ of the state (law of 9 December 1928) highlighted the intention to bring the party under the control of the state²⁴².

²³⁷ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. I: *La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin 1966), pp. 55ff

²³⁸ Gentile, E., "Partito, Stato e Duce nella mitologia e nella organizzazione del fascismo", in Bracher, K. D., Valiani, L. (eds.), *Fascismo e nazionalsocialismo* (Bologna 1986), pp. 265-94

²³⁹ Lyttelton, "The Second Wave", pp. 50ff; *The Seizure of Power. Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (London 1987, 2nd ed.), pp. 237-268; Segrè, Balbo, pp. 118-38; Brooker, P., *The Faces of Fraternalism. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan* (Oxford 1991), pp. 157ff; Gallo, pp. 181-92; Rossini, G. (ed.), *Il delitto Matteotti tra il Viminale e l'Aventino. Dagli atti del processo De Bono davanti all'Alta Corte di Giustizia* (Bologna 1966); Rocco, M., *Come il fascismo divenne una dittatura* (Milan 1956), pp. 124f

²⁴⁰ Aquarone, A., *L'organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin 1965), pp. 67-8

²⁴¹ For the incident see De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. II: *L'organizzazione dello Stato Fascista, 1925-1929* (Turin 1968), pp. 62ff

²⁴² Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 73-92; Finer, pp. 277f; Gentile, E., "The Problem of the Party in Italian Fascism", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), pp. 261-70. The text of the law in *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 493-5; and in Clough, S. B., Saladino, S., *A History of Modern Italy. Documents, Readings and Commentary* (New York and London 1968), pp. 444-5

Meaningfully, with the law of 24 December 1925, Mussolini as Head of the government was recognised as the sole repository of the Crown's power²⁴³. After Farinacci, the position of Party Secretary was offered to less independent members of the PNF (Turati, Giurati) who assumed the responsibility to monitor the activities of the party *gerarchi* and *ras*, thus further distancing Mussolini from party structures and opponents²⁴⁴. However, it was during the eight years in which A. Starace was Party Secretary (1931-1939) that the de-politicisation of the PNF reached its peak. Bottai described *staracismo* as a negation of Fascism's interest in the content of politics, as opposed to *style* and presentation. As he argued in an article published in *Critica Fascista*, the party sacrificed its spiritual intensity for the sake of superficial appearance²⁴⁵. For him, under Starace the party accepted its "expulsion from politics" and its subordination to the necessities of *mussolinismo*²⁴⁶. In a similar vein, Grandi attributed the phenomenal unpopularity of the party to Starace's reforms and lack of political substance²⁴⁷. With the decree of January 1927, the party was officially subordinated to the state as organ for the indoctrination and organisation of the population²⁴⁸. This meant the death warrant of alternative non-etatist conceptions of a Fascist system - Farinacci's idea of a strong party against state control or Rossoni's vision of mass syndicalist organisations²⁴⁹. The party secretary was not admitted into the Council of Ministers until 1937, but even this belated participation did not reverse the loss of authority by the PNF. When in 1930 Turati attempted to establish himself as *de facto* deputy of Mussolini, by claiming the position of Under-Secretary to the Interior Ministry (with Mussolini as Minister) as complementary to his role as Party secretary, he was immediately dismissed²⁵⁰. As for Farinacci's concept of an

²⁴³ Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 395-6; translated in Clough *et al.* (eds.), *History of Modern Italy*, pp. 368ff; Delle Piane, M., *Gaetano Mosca: classe politica e liberalismo* (Naples 1952), pp. 451-2

²⁴⁴ De Grand, A. J., *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The 'fascist' style of rule* (London & New York 1995), pp. 33-7

²⁴⁵ Bottai, G., "Bilancio di cinque anni", *Critica Fascista*, 1 October 1930

²⁴⁶ Bottai, *Vent'anni*, pp. 42-4

²⁴⁷ Grandi, D., *Il mio paese. Ricordi autobiografici*, ed. by Renzo De Felice (Bologna 1985), pp. 201ff

²⁴⁸ Fried, R. C., *The Italian Prefect* (New Haven 1963), pp. 181f; Brooker, P., *The Faces of Fraternalism. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan* (Oxford 1991), pp. 153-68; Germino, pp. 34ff; Gentile, E., "The Problem of the Party", pp. 259-60

²⁴⁹ Sarti, "Italian fascism", pp. 25ff

²⁵⁰ De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, pp. 33-4

élite party organisation, inaccessible to opportunist newcomers through a membership ban, it materialised only temporarily in 1925-26. Then, membership was reopened and in 1932 the idea of compulsory participation to the PNF (in order to include all civil servants of the "Fascist" state) led to a dramatic increase in the party's membership figures. Further influx of members took place in 1936 and in 1940, transforming the party into a mass organisation of the state's centralised authority over society²⁵¹. With the amendments to the Party Statute of 1932 the Grand Council ceased to be a party organ and was recognised as the highest *state* organ, while the PNF Secretary became exclusively dependent upon, and accountable to the *Duce*, who was responsible for selecting and replacing the holder of the post.

The depoliticisation of the PNF, through its subordination to the political will of the state and the neutralisation of dissident trends within its ranks, reflected Mussolini's ambitions to establish a truly authoritarian model of government. In justifying his policy towards the party, Mussolini stressed in December 1936 that political decision-making did not concern the party as an institution; instead, "the party should always concentrate solely on the political education of the people"²⁵². The party was allowed to perform totalitarian functions on a societal level (youth, leisure, press, education) but only once it had been deprived of its collective right to political co-decision²⁵³. Even after the PNF's crucial role in promoting the racial legislation against Jews, Arabs and Africans, the party remained the semi-effective "nervous system" of the *Duce*'s political will²⁵⁴. Its growing unpopularity with the Italian population hampered the main task of "militarising" the nation and transforming Fascism into a catholic secular religion for the whole nation²⁵⁵. This

²⁵¹ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, pp. 271-95; Gentile, "The Problem of the Party", pp. 263ff; De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, pp. 36-7. For general membership trends see the figures and analysis in Germino, pp. 50-6

²⁵² Bottai, *Diario*, 9.12.1936. Cf. Bottai G., *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* (Milan 1977), pp. 37-44

²⁵³ See De Grazia, V., *The Culture of Consent. Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge 1981), pp. 226ff; Germino, pp. 41-5, 62-82

²⁵⁴ Gentile, "Partito, Stato e Duce", pp. 285-6. For the PNF's role in shaping and promoting the racial legislation see Michaelis, M., *Mussolini and the Jews. German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945* (Oxford 1978), pp. 109ff; De Felice, R., *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* (Turin 1972), pp. 271-301

²⁵⁵ The unpopularity of the party is discussed in Thompson, D., *State Control in Fascist Italy. Culture and Conformity, 1925-43* (Manchester & New York 1991), pp. 79-81. For the religious elements in

failure rendered the *Duce's* authoritarian position even more crucial for the preservation of social unity and gradually reduced his reliance on collective party approval in defining and implementing his radical plans for a "new state" and a "new man"²⁵⁶. In this sense, *mussolinismo* was reconciled with the totalitarian aspirations of the party, but only once the former had hijacked the political influence of the latter. *Ex post facto* attempts to present the monopolisation of Fascism by Mussolini as predetermined by Fascist political ideology have been taken at face value by exponents of the "totalitarian power" of the party, like D. Germino and E. Gentile²⁵⁷. Such a totalitarianism, however, subjected to authoritarian rule and etatism, was the utter antithesis of the system that syndicalists, *squadristi* and many *gerarchi* had cherished in the early years of the Fascist movement²⁵⁸. Many old fighters continued to criticise the alteration of Fascism's character and disapproved of the marginalisation of old members in favour of conservative nationalists, such as Rocco and Federzoni, ex-liberal intellectuals, like Gentile, or ambitious younger members, such as Ciano²⁵⁹. Bottai kept deploring the pro-German shift in Italian policy, regarding it as a contradiction to the spirit and intellectual traditions of Italian Fascism, although he publicly supported the regime's policy of rapprochement with Nazi Germany²⁶⁰. After the war, he castigated Mussolini's efforts to monopolise Fascism in the 1930s, presenting the emergence of *mussolinismo* as a *de facto* negation of the collective, evolving spirit of Fascism²⁶¹. Marinetti accepted his election to the Italian Academy in spite of his aversion to "intellectual" institutions, but could not hide his disillusionment with the regime's lack of progress towards a

fascism and the PNF see Gentile, E., *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome & Bari 1993), 107-54; Brooker, pp. 148-68. For a different perspective, underlining the crucial role of the party, see Germino, pp. 38f

²⁵⁶ Gentile, "Partito, Stato e Duce", pp. 272f, 279

²⁵⁷ Germino, p. 144 and Ch. 8; Gentile, *Storia del Partito Fascista*, pp. viii, 17ff. See also the discussion of the existing historiography in Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London & New York 1996), pp. 36-8

²⁵⁸ Sarti, "Italian fascism", pp. 27f; Brooker, pp. 157-8

²⁵⁹ Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 269ff; Gentile, *Ideological fascista*, pp. 218-28; Fanelli, G. A., *Contra Gentiles mistificazioni dell'idealismo attuale nella Rivoluzione fascista* (Rome 1933), discussed in Germino, pp. 134-6

²⁶⁰ Bottai, G., *Vent'anni*, p. 72; and Bottai, *Diario*, 30.8.1938. See also, in this study, Ch. 5, Section IIc

²⁶¹ Bottai, *Vent'anni*, pp. 25ff; De Grand, A. J., *Bottai e la cultura fascista* (Rome & Bari 1978), Ch. IV, VI

domestic transformation of Italian society. As for Balbo, always the strongest voice of criticism in the Grand Council, he kept criticising Mussolini's distance from the party members and institutions, deploring the change in his *Capo's* attitude towards the old fighters and underlining the danger that, in his isolation, Mussolini appeared to have lost his political astuteness²⁶². In the end, of course, loyalty to the *Duce* would dictate an acceptance of his political decisions. In all these cases, however, reservations about the regime's developments entailed an implicit criticism of the *Duce's* personal, authoritarian rule.

The subordination and de-politicisation of the party becomes even more evident in the field of foreign affairs. The Council of Ministers, a body supposed to maintain the collective character of government decision-making, gradually came to be dominated by Mussolini's long monologues, losing any real consultative or co-decision function. One of its most prominent Fascist members, Bottai, noted with pessimism in July 1940 that the institution was in a state of "plain decadence", with its allegedly collective character overshadowed by the authoritarian tendency of *mussolinismo* and the *Duce's* insistence on monopolising responsibility for every single political issue²⁶³. Similar feelings were expressed privately even by Ciano, who often found the monopolisation of the meetings by Mussolini and the lack of debate "deeply humiliating"²⁶⁴. The Fascist Grand Council was not consulted in the formulation of the plan to attack Ethiopia, a fact that infuriated both Balbo and Federzoni²⁶⁵. Mussolini and Ciano also kept the Council uninformed about preliminary preparations for the invasion of Albania in the first half of 1938²⁶⁶. In a number of occasions, Mussolini used the frequent meetings of the Council to legitimise *faits accomplis*. The *Anschluss* was presented as the desired choice of Italian policy, while participation in the Spanish Civil War had already been agreed before the members of the Council applauded Mussolini's determination to promote

²⁶² Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 271-5, pp. 372-3; Michaelis, M., "Il Maresciallo dell'aria Italo Balbo e la politica mussoliniana", *Storia Contemporanea*, 14 (1983), pp. 350ff; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. 1: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1974), pp. 720f

²⁶³ Bottai, *Diario*, 6.7.1940

²⁶⁴ Quoted in De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 254-5

²⁶⁵ Michaelis, "Il Maresciallo dell'aria", pp. 351-2; Casmirri, S., "Luigi Federzoni", in Cordova, F. (ed.), *Uomini e volti del fascismo* (Rome 1980), pp. 294ff

²⁶⁶ Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 70, 150f

the alleged interests of international fascism²⁶⁷. Individually, however, a number of leading Fascist figures expressed doubts about the advisability of Italy's involvement in Spain. Balbo reacted angrily, criticising Mussolini's awkward handling of sensitive foreign policy issues²⁶⁸. If the Council was supposed to be the institutional expression of the party's right to influence decision-making, the *Duce* showed that he would not be influenced by any form of criticism. At the Council meeting of 21 March 1939, Balbo was even less tactful - he accused Mussolini of "licking Hitler's boots" and reminded the other participants that there was still the possibility of opting for Britain against Nazi aggression²⁶⁹. When the news about the signing of the Pact of Steel reached Rome in May 1939, not only Bottai but also Federzoni and Grandi could not hide their frustration²⁷⁰. Bottai, on the other hand, offered a more elaborate implicit criticism through the pages of *Critica Fascista*. He accepted the internationalisation of Fascism as a logical extension of its internal vitality and spiritual advantage (compared to the democratic and communist regimes), but warned that such an internationalisation should be promoted very carefully, in order to avoid associating it with opportunistic imitators²⁷¹.

Mussolini allowed discussion and tolerated verbal dissidence (as can be seen by his relatively calm reaction to Balbo's extreme comments of March 1939²⁷², but was unmoved by other concepts of foreign policy-making, even if these came from prominent Fascist *gerarchi*. He had manifested his determination to control foreign affairs by retaining the portfolio of the Foreign Minister until 1928 and in the 1932-36 period. His two other choices for the post, Grandi and Ciano, were intended to promote the "fascistisation" of the style of Italian diplomacy but not to enhance the political influence of the party as an institution in the shaping of foreign policy.

²⁶⁷ DGFP, D, 1, 399 (Plessen to Foreign Ministry, 25 March 1938). For the manner in which the news of the *Anschluss* were presented to the Italian public opinion see Ciano's *Diaries, 1937-8*, 12.3.1938; Lowe, C. J., Marzari F., *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London & Boston 1975), pp. 303ff

²⁶⁸ Michaelis, "Il Maresciallo dell'aria", pp. 334-5

²⁶⁹ Bottai, *Diario*, 14.2.1939; Ciano's *Diaries*, 21.3.1939; Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 357-8

²⁷⁰ Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 358-62; Grandi, *Il mio paese*, Ch. 41; Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome 1980), pp. 468ff

²⁷¹ Bottai, *Vent'anni*, pp. 55-62; De Grand, *Bottai*, Ch. VII

²⁷² His reaction is documented by Ciano, who protested violently to the comments - see Ciano's *Diaries*, 21.3.1939

Grandi, as a moderate and opponent of a strong party, was a *de facto* reluctant agent²⁷³. Ciano, on the other hand, used the increased role of the *Gabinetto* to promote compliant party colleagues, such as Anfuso, who would dutifully support his foreign policy agenda and transform the Foreign Ministry into a docile institution for his personal elevation²⁷⁴. As we saw earlier, both under Grandi and especially Ciano, the political power of Fascist elements in the Palazzo Chigi increased rapidly at the expense of the traditional diplomatic groups. Yet, the promotion of selected personnel from the PNF was made on the basis of personal allegiance to the *Duce* and his appointees as Foreign Ministers. Even the political autonomy of the Foreign Ministers was circumscribed by their detachment from the party's control, by their subordination to the will of the state and by Mussolini's ultimate right to dismiss them at any time. In this sense, the promotion of party members to state positions (Grandi, Bottai, Balbo, De Bono, Ciano) did entail an increase in their personal political power, but this power was not transferred cumulatively to the party, whose influence upon the leader-oriented decision-making process of the regime waned. In spite of the existence of ideological currents which either contradicted Mussolini's political decisions or aimed to alter them, the party as institution and collective expression of Fascist values conspicuously failed to sponsor a political agenda autonomous from Mussolini's will and thus lost its institutional capacity to effectively influence the decision-making process²⁷⁵. In the end, all these leading figures of Fascism found it impossible to push their individual disagreements Mussolini's political decisions to extremes. The cult of the leader, the notion of loyalty to the *Capo* and the belief that he incarnated Fascist values, provided the strongest force of integration within the Fascist regime, overcoming even the strong opposition by the majority of Fascist *gerarchi* to the alliance with Germany and the anti-Semitic legislation. In spite of differences of opinion, they still viewed their allegiance to the *Duce* as a moral task to serve Fascism. In this sense, the motion of 24/25 July 1943 was consistent with the overall philosophy of the Italian Fascist state in that opposition to the *Duce*'s will could be intelligible only as a vote of no-

²⁷³ See, in this chapter, Section IIIa

²⁷⁴ Gilbert, "Ciano and his Ambassadors", pp. 517-8; Donosti, *Mussolini e l'Europa*, pp. 12ff

confidence in his overall political position and function as *Capo del Governo* / leader of Fascism and not in individual policies he sponsored²⁷⁶.

Germany: Hitler's authoritarianism and the NSDAP's quest for a political role in the Nazi system

In Germany, a similar institutional tension between the totalitarian aspirations of the NSDAP and the authoritarian concept of rule epitomised in Hitler's leadership surfaced long before the *Machtübernahme*. The much longer period of incubation offered the NSDAP significantly wider time margins to crystallise its ideological character and its internal structures of power. By 1930, Hitler had successfully established his position as the indisputable leader of the movement by eliminating the opposition from the more "left-wing" group of the party²⁷⁷. He had also asserted his authoritarian and charismatic concept of rule at the expense of party collective decision-making. Plans to establish a party Senate as the highest ideological organ of the NSDAP were tacitly dropped by Hitler. The *Führer* also thwarted or revoked the systematic reforms of G. Strasser in 1928-32, which intended to streamline the whole party organisation; a similar fate awaited Ley's plans from 1933 onwards to centralise and rationalise administrative control over the party organisation²⁷⁸. By the time of the acquisition of power, the *Führer* possessed an ideological and political monopoly over the NSDAP, avoiding any form of collective representation of party interests on the leadership level or any accumulation of permanent power by either

²⁷⁵ Gentile, E., *Il culto del littorio*, pp. 269ff

²⁷⁶ For the motion see Clough *et al.* (eds.), *History of Modern Italy*, pp. 514-5. For an analysis see Schröder, J., "La caduta di Mussolini e la contromisure tedesche nell' Italia centrale fino alla formazione della Repubblica Sociale Italiana", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L' Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati* (Bologna 1973), pp. 138ff; Eatwell, *Fascism*, pp. 80-2

²⁷⁷ Stachura, P. D., "Der 'Fall Strasser': Gregor Strasser, Hitler and National Socialism", in *ibid.* (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London 1978), pp. 88-130; and his *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of the Nazi Party* (Newton Abbot 1969), pp. 22-66; Kissenkoetter, U., *Gregor Strasser und die NSDAP* (Stuttgart 1978), pp. 22-7; Nyomarkay, pp. 90ff; Tyrell, A., "Gottfried Feder and the NSDAP", in Stachura (ed.), *Shaping of the Nazi State*, pp. 48-87

²⁷⁸ For the Senate see Struve, pp. 436-8; Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 207f; Mommsen, H., "National Socialism: Continuity and Change", pp. 154-5. Hitler declared his desire to establish a Senate in August 1933 [Domarus, *Hitler*, I, p. 292 - speech to Reichs- and Gau-leiters, 6 August 1933] but nothing came out of these declarations. For Strasser's efforts see Stachura, "Der 'Fall Strasser'", pp. 90ff; and, for Ley's plans, Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, 85ff, 152f, 183ff

individuals or agencies. At the same time, however, the long duration of the *Kampfzeit* had transformed the NSDAP into an effective institution of mass support for Hitler and a much more sophisticated hierarchical organisation than the PNF²⁷⁹. By 1933, the Nazi party had developed a fairly elaborate division of expertise amongst its ranks - Rosenberg in foreign affairs, Hess and Ley in organisational issues, Goering in technical and economic issues, Röhm as the leader of an alternative military organisation for the armed forces of Nazi Germany²⁸⁰. The strengthening of the political power of certain individuals and groups within the party did not pose an institutional challenge to Hitler's power, as he was seen as the sole originator of policy²⁸¹. It did, however, create an élite within the NSDAP with competences and ambitions which could justify the party's right to co-decide policy issues.

Such hopes were frustrated very quickly, not only because the "minimum consensus" programme foiled a direct Nazi assault on the state, but also because Hitler was aware of the need to keep up appearances during the difficult period of consolidation. In 1933-34, the SA and Röhm, who aspired to absorb the *Reichswehr* into their ranks and sponsored the idea of a "constant revolution" presented Hitler with the last major case of ideological opposition from his party²⁸². The purge of June 1934 was, therefore, significant in two different ways. First, it underlined Hitler's determination to safeguard the authoritarian basis of his power against any possible contender, be that from the state or the party. Second, it showed that the *Führer* was serious about his declarations, on 13 July 1934, that the "revolution was over", in the sense that the main component of the Nazi system - the *Führer's* charismatic rule - had been established and would not be institutionally challenged²⁸³. With the Law for Ensuring the Unity of Party and State (December

²⁷⁹ Brooker, pp. 154-6; Knox, "Conquest, Domestic and Foreign", pp. 29-30

²⁸⁰ Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 56-60, 94ff

²⁸¹ Nyomarkay, Chs. 3-5

²⁸² Broszat, *Hitler State*, Ch. 6; Carr, "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", pp. 166-9

²⁸³ On Hitler's declaration see Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 411-28 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 13 July 1934), 447-8 (Proclamation, 5 September 1934); Baynes, N. H. (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler. April 1922- August 1939* (London, New York, Toronto 1942), I, p. 805. For the legal basis of Hitler's "charismatic" rule see Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, I, pp. 198f; Kettenacker, "The German View", pp. 32ff; Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 207ff

1933) the former was recognised as the sole political organisation but was tied to the state and was thus frustrated in its hoped to be the sole "source of the will of the state"²⁸⁴. The party could draw some consolation from the fact that Hess, head of the *Politische Organisation* and Hitler's Deputy, was given immediately a position in the cabinet and possessed the privilege of being the only spokesman for Hitler with strong power to control state appointments²⁸⁵. However, ironically, the increased powers of Hess led to the strengthening of Hitler's authoritarian rule. The *Führer*, who had deliberately divided G. Strasser's former functions between Ley and Hess, used the PO against Ley's effort to accumulate power through the extension of the DAF²⁸⁶. He also exploited the SA purge to ban intra-party political debate and to cleanse the party of dissident voices²⁸⁷. In contrast to Italy, where the Council of Ministers remained in function until the fall of the regime, in Germany the Cabinet lapsed into oblivion from 1934 onwards, thwarting a more effective fusion between state and party, and strengthening the PO's reliance upon Hitler's personal will.

The old fighters were disappointed by the slow pace of fascistisation of the state²⁸⁸. Frick, the Minister of the Interior, had successfully fought an institutional battle against the NSDAP in 1933, legislating against the mass influx of party members into the civil service²⁸⁹. By 1937 none of the department heads of the Ministries had been members of the party before 1933, and only two could claim any connection with the NSDAP²⁹⁰. The *alte Kämpfer* opposed the opening of the party membership in 1937, as they were deeply distrustful of the "newcomers'" motives

²⁸⁴ Diehl-Thiele, pp. 135ff; Mommsen, H., "Ausnahmestand als Herrschaftstechnik des Nationalsozialistischen-Regimes", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 35f

²⁸⁵ Schoenbaum, D., *Hitler's Social Revolution. Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (New York & London 1980), pp. 22f

²⁸⁶ Diehl-Thiele, pp. 210f; Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 131ff; Mommsen, H., "NS: Continuity and Change", pp. 170-1

²⁸⁷ See Hitler's orders issued on the day of the SA purge in Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 401-2

²⁸⁸ Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 138f

²⁸⁹ Caplan, *Government without Administration*, Chs. 5-6; Mommsen, H., *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich. Mit ausgewählten Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Beamtenpolitik* (Stuttgart 1966), pp. 45ff; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, II, pp. 223-5. For the role of the Ministry of the Interior under Frick see Peterson, E. N., *The Limits of Hitler's Power* (Princeton 1969), pp. 77-148, who however exaggerates the importance of these institutional limits to the actual power of the Nazi leader.

²⁹⁰ Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 226-7

and feared the loss of the élite status of the party²⁹¹. They also regretted the party's lack of control over powerful institutions and policy areas. Attempts to fascistise the armed forces by establishing commissars in charge of indoctrinating the soldiers did not have much success until the war years²⁹². As for the party's ambition to "determine the final form of foreign policy", as the *Völkischer Beobachter* claimed in May 1933, the mere presence of Neurath as Foreign Minister, his good relations with Hitler until 1937 and the very limited fascistisation of the *Wilhelmstrasse* during the same period underlined the failure of the party's totalitarian ambitions²⁹³.

Contrary to Italy, the role of leading party members was enhanced as a result of the radicalisation of Nazi policies after 1936. Goering supervised the Four-Year-Plan with enhanced powers over economic planning and rearmament; under the new law of 1937, Hess controlled all appointments to the Civil Service; Ribbentrop established himself as the new start of Nazi diplomacy, while Himmler was allowed to expand the political and military jurisdiction of the SS²⁹⁴. Hitler himself became increasingly reclusive, indifferent to day-to-day internal affairs and concentrating more and more on his foreign policy plans. His gradual retreat from domestic affairs after 1936 allowed a small group of leading party officials significant latitude in implementing Nazi policy and in running the government. Apart from those already mentioned, Goebbels rose to prominence in the last years before the war as Propaganda Minister, while Bormann gained Hitler's confidence and strengthened his position as the main link between the leader and the outside world as Hess' power diminished²⁹⁵.

²⁹¹ Mommsen, "NS: Continuity and Change", pp. 166-9; Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 202-7; Brooker, pp. 88-104. On the NSDAP's membership trends see Kater, M., *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Oxford 1983), pp. 263-7, figs. 1-5; Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, I, pp. 202f

²⁹² Berghahn, "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung'", pp. 19ff. See also Ch. 6, Section VIa

²⁹³ Quote from Jacobsen, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik*, pp. 45ff

²⁹⁴ In sequence: Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 300ff and Overy, *Goering*, Chs. 3-5; Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 178f; Michalka, "Joachim von Ribbentrop", pp. 168f; Lösener, B., "Als Rassereferent im Reichsministerium des Innern", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 9 (1961), pp. 135-61; Hausser, P., *Soldaten wie andere auch. Der Weg der Waffen-SS* (Osnabrück 1966), pp. 152ff. Also, see Mommsen, H., "NS: Continuity and Change", pp. 171f

²⁹⁵ Speer, A., *Inside the Third Reich* (London 1970), Chs. 7, 9; Kube, A., "Hermann Goering: The Second Man in the Reich" and Froehlich, E., "Joseph Goebbels: The Propagandist", both in Smelser, Zitelmann (ed.), *Nazi Elite*, pp. 62-73 and 48-61 respectively

This, however, did not result in the strengthening of party influence as a whole at the expense of Hitler's authoritarianism. In fact, delegation of power took place mainly on the administrative, and not the political, level only after the PO in association with Hitler had neutralised the last major enclaves of opposition within the party. The *Führer*'s confidence in the unshakeable basis of his supreme power is manifested by the delegation of the *Führerprinzip* to the Reich ministers at the beginning of 1936²⁹⁶. He also believed that differences of opinion could be resolved and settled through time without necessitating his bureaucratic intervention²⁹⁷. His authoritarian concept of rule actually presupposed a considerable level of party political autonomy and experimentation with alternative, radical forms of policy-making. The party provided a dynamic mechanism for implementing Hitler's policies, deciphering his intentions and ensuring optimal conditions for successful policy-making. As state institutions and traditional élites were becoming increasingly inflexible with the *Führer*'s political demands, he relied on party officials and strengthened party influence over the state. Like Mussolini, however, he perceived politics as a matter of personal trust and avoided any permanent institutionalisation of power²⁹⁸. The party was important as a reservoir of multiple alternative solutions to policy problems. This explains why he was willing to defy government protocol in favour of a party favourite or to abandon one previous party ally for another. Yet, in the end, the NSDAP as a whole institution lacked any form of collective representation or political power in the Nazi system. Hitler's authoritarian system increasingly made use of the party's totalitarian ambitions against the authority of the state, but also created a sphere of administrative responsibility for party officials which remained separate from, and subordinate to, his exclusive prerogative to generate policy or have the ultimate say as mediator in policy disputes.

This dualism between authoritarianism and totalitarianism becomes evident in the realm of foreign policy, an area which Hitler, like Mussolini, strove to

²⁹⁶ Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, 172-3

²⁹⁷ von Kotze, H., Krausnick, H. (eds.), *Es spricht der Führer* (Gütersloh 1966), pp. 132-57; Mommsen, H., "Ausnahmezustand", pp. 30-45

²⁹⁸ Mommsen, H., "NS: Continuity and Change", pp. 173-4

monopolise²⁹⁹. Initially, the party played a limited role in either influencing or implementing policy decisions. After the failure of Rosenberg to make an impression with his London visit in 1933, Hitler relied on Neurath and the *Wilhelmstrasse* for the execution of the regime's official foreign policy. The party's autonomy in dealing with subversive organisations outside the Reich, like the Austrian National Socialists and Henlein's Sudeten German Party, was supported by Hitler as a Trojan horse for future German irredentist claims over these states³⁰⁰. However, the failure to control party activities during the Vienna Coup of July 1934 convinced him of the need to curtail party political initiatives and to strengthen Hess' role in co-ordinating and monitoring more effectively the NSDAP³⁰¹. In this sense, the contribution of the party to foreign policy decision-making until 1936 was minimal, but the party itself continued to operate as the laboratory of radical solutions for future expansionist projects, like the *Anschluss*, the Sudeten problem and the Polish Corridor. Ribbentrop's special role in dealing with Britain and Goering's responsibility for Danzig and the promotion of German-Italian relations underline Hitler's determination to exploit all possible avenues in search of the best solution for foreign policy-making.

The party's role became more influential with the Spanish Civil War. Against the wishes of Neurath, Hitler allowed significant latitude both to the AO members in Spain and to Prince Philip of Hessen in dealing directly with Franco's officials in Spain and with the Italian Fascist leadership respectively³⁰². A year later, Hess was authorised to establish the "Office of the Special Assistant for Foreign Policy Questions". This was an important development as it highlighted Hitler's decision to enhance the party's involvement in foreign affairs while retaining his grip over decision-making through subjecting party activities in this field to the scrutiny of his loyal Deputy. Hess had accumulated powers since 1934 and his office played a

²⁹⁹ For Hitler's special interest in foreign policy see Mommsen, H., "Ausnahmestand", p. 43; and for his opt-out from domestic affairs, Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 627, and II, p. 245. For Mussolini's attempt to concentrate more power and supervise more foreign policy activities see Gallo, M., *Mussolini's Italy. Twenty Years of the Fascist Era* (London 1973), pp. 212-3

³⁰⁰ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 225-6, 312ff; *Starting World War II*, pp. 288ff, 327ff

³⁰¹ Ross, D., *Hitler und Dollfuss. Die deutsche Österreichpolitik. 1933-1934* (Hamburg 1966), passim

pivotal role in the *Anschluss*, alongside Goering. In the aftermath of the crisis, Hess - and not the Reich ministers - acquired the right to control and approve the legislation of the new Austrian government under Seyss-Inquart³⁰³.

However, Hitler's shift to the party did not entail either a waning of his autonomous basis of power or an institutional boost to the party as a whole. The *Führer* retained his right to appoint Gauleiters and make them directly accountable to him³⁰⁴. He also favoured certain groups and individuals within the NSDAP - Himmler's SS were again linked directly to Hitler, bypassing both the *Wehrmacht* leadership and the party bureaucracy, while Goering enhanced his power-base by assuming control of the Aryanisation programme in the occupied areas³⁰⁵. The NSDAP participated in the decision-making process as a conglomerate of individuals and agencies with no institutional cohesion and no permanent political roles. Responsibilities and jurisdictions were allocated on an *ad hoc* basis, lacking any co-ordinated plan for division of labour. If the party played a crucial role in the Austrian crisis of March 1938 (through its direct links with the Austrian National Socialist Party), its contribution to Hitler's policy towards Czechoslovakia in 1938 was confined to continued dealings with the Sudeten party leadership, while with regard to Poland in 1939 the party's role again was limited to cooperation with the local organisations in Danzig. Ribbentrop was by then the indisputable tsar of Nazi diplomacy, overshadowing even Goering who after the *Anschluss*, shifted to a less warlike and aggressive policy of German expansion, thus losing favour with Hitler³⁰⁶. However, Ribbentrop was never a "party" man. He had always been regarded by the *alte Kämpfer* as an outsider. Rosenberg, for most the obvious "party"

³⁰² Schieder, W., "Spanischer Bürgerkrieg und Vierjahresplan. Zur Struktur der nationalsozialistischen Aussenpolitik", in Michalka, W. (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik* (Darmstadt 1978), pp. 325-59; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 284ff

³⁰³ Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 231-40

³⁰⁴ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, II, pp. 196-7; Diehl-Thiele, pp. 216ff. See also, in general, Hüttenberg, P., *Die Gauleiter* (Stuttgart 1969)

³⁰⁵ For the special status of the SS see Krausnick, H., Buchheim, H., Broszat, M., Jacobsen, H.-A. (eds.), *Anatomy of the SS State* (London 1968); Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 918-21. For the Aryanisation Programme see Orlow, *Nazi Party*, II, pp. 250-1

³⁰⁶ Lamb, R., *The Ghosts of Peace 1935-45* (London 1987), pp. 110-20; Overy, *Goering*, pp. 80-1, 88-94; Mommsen, H., "Reflections on the position of Hitler and Göring in the Third Reich", in Childers, T., Caplan, J. (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York & London 1993), pp. 94-5; Hildebrand, K., *The Third Reich* (London 1984), pp. 36-8; Heinemann, pp. 179-81

expert in foreign affairs, did not refrain from criticising the main parameters of Nazi foreign policy in the last years before the war. Using the 1936 Party Rally at Nuremberg as a forum for expressing his alternative ideas, he gave a speech on the "ideological character" of Nazi foreign policy, repeating his basic motto of eastern expansion and alliance with Britain. Two years later, at the last Party Rally before the war, he emphasised the importance of Germany's "interests in the east". He was relatively relieved when Ribbentrop promoted the Anti-Comintern Pact, but was extremely sceptical of what he perceived as its predominantly anti-British implications³⁰⁷. However, by entering one of the senior offices of the state Ribbentrop had been placed in the sphere of Hitler's authoritarian power, insulated from criticism and invested with significant powers for the handling of foreign affairs. This underlines the idiosyncratic character of the participation of the state in Germany - Nazi figures eroded the state mechanism but, once in state positions, they fell more firmly under Hitler's political influence and weakened their ties with the party organisation.

V: Conclusions

The establishment of a fascist state in Italy and Germany reflected the relative gains and losses in a triangular institutional battle between traditional élites, fascist leaderships and fascist parties. The initial cohabitation of the two leaders with the traditional groups in the context of a caesarist state, based on the "minimum consensus" compromise, strengthened the authoritarian tendencies in Mussolini's and Hitler's rule. Both the traditional élites groups and the fascist parties looked to the two leaders as guarantors of their political influence at the expense of the other. This situation allowed the two leaders to use the party in order to erode the legitimacy of the state while preserving the institutional dualism between state and

³⁰⁷ Cecil, R., *The Myth of the Master Race. Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London 1972), pp. 77ff, 141ff

party as a means to curtail the party's totalitarian aspirations. The authoritarian basis of their rule facilitated the institutional subordination of the traditional élites and their relegation to the status of functional bureaucracies for the execution (and not co-decision-making) of fascist policies. In Italy this was achieved through the total identification of the *Duce* with the state and the centralisation of political authority in his hands. In Germany, the traditional strength of state bureaucracies ruled out a similar etatist approach, dictating instead a different strategy of subordination, whereby state functions were constantly being duplicated by party organisations, thus reducing the state to one amongst many policy-making options available to the *Führer*.

With regard to the party as institution, in both countries it was allowed to perform its totalitarian functions on a social level, but was carefully excluded from any mechanism of collective political decision-making. In general, the party was integrated into the institutional structure of the fascist system at a lower level of authority than the leader, who established his exclusive role as policy originator. In this sense, the party's totalitarian aspirations were accommodated only to the extent that they did not infringe upon the leader's authoritarian power. The differences in the style of leadership exercised by Mussolini and Hitler determined different margins of activity for the PNF and the NSDAP respectively. The former was so heavily involved in so many everyday affairs of the regime (even if his involvement was superficial) that left very limited space to the party as a whole for political initiative. Instead, he relied on a number of party officials who were transferred to responsible state posts. Hitler, on the other hand, was so mesmerised by long-term foreign policy plans that, especially after 1936, he had little time for the internal issues of the German state. This released significant space for party activities in implementing the *Führer's* will, but was carefully monitored either by Hitler himself (as the ultimate mediator) or by his loyal Deputy Hess and, later, by his right-hand man Bormann. Although the role of the party increased in Germany after 1936, ironically, its political significance as a whole diminished, because Hitler either moved his favoured party officials to state posts or made them directly accountable to him independently of central party control. In both cases, this resulted in their integration into the sphere of Hitler's authoritarian power and thwarted their primary obligation to the party. Unlike in Italy, however, where the PNF continued to lose

political influence, Hitler encouraged the radicalism of the NSDAP as a reservoir of alternative options for policy-making and showed an increasing inclination to make *ad hoc* use of agencies and individuals for the pursuit of specific goals³⁰⁸.

Therefore, the centrality of the leader in the fascist system's decision-making process was predetermined neither by any plans nor by clear fascist theory of state. The way the fascist state evolved until the outbreak of the Second World War does reflect the two leaders' determination to safeguard their authoritarian rule against power-sharing with other fascist and non-fascist élite groups. The separation of their sphere of power from the administrative layers of policy-making resulted in a chaotic system of government where no clear or permanent division of labour and jurisdiction was ever imposed. This uncoordinated polyocracy plagued even the etatist model of Italian Fascism. Confusion, however, was more acute in Germany, where the traditional strength of state bureaucracies and the higher degree of party autonomy from state control resulted in multiple jurisdictional conflicts which Hitler never resolved with a definite institutional arrangement. In both cases, however, the central authority of the fascist leaders emanated from their exclusive prerogative of defining the framework of policy-making and of acting as the ultimate arbiter of political battles.

In this sense, Mussolini and Hitler's authoritarian power should be placed in a perspective that rejects both the concept of omnipotence and the idea of weakness resulting from the party's totalitarian power or the administrative chaos of the fascist systems. Especially in the field of foreign affairs, which the two leaders perceived as the preserve of their charismatic authority, the institutional separation of the leader's decision-making prerogative (objectives) from implementing policies (strategy, means) was rigid and offset any prospect of power-sharing. Co-decision-making was simply an ephemeral stage in the transition to authoritarian rule which reduced the influence of the traditional élites and of the party as a whole to a functional level of providing solutions for the promotion of the regimes' objectives. This system did not prevent individuals from winning the leaders' trust and influencing their short- and medium-term plans or strategies. These were, however, not institutional limitations on the leaders' power, in the sense that they did not obligate the leaders to treat either

³⁰⁸ For this tendency during the war years see, in this study, Ch. 6, Section VIa

state institutions or party agencies as normative features of the decision-making process. As it happened with the ephemeral popularity of Grandi's *peso determinante*, Rosenberg's APA, Ribbentrop's "tripartite" alliance and Admiral Raeder's "Mediterranean strategy", Mussolini and Hitler were institutionally free to choose from the available policy options and then discard policies and individuals without any obligation to accountability.

CHAPTER 4

Ideology in practice? Fascist foreign policies from revisionism to large-scale expansion (1922-1939)

I: Introduction

Hindsight is a dubious privilege for a historian. The acrimonious debate about the programmatic or not character of the Italian and German foreign policies in the interwar period exposed its ambiguous nature. On the one hand, knowledge of the evolution of the two regimes' expansionist plans into the Axis alliance and war has helped to relate the radicalisation of fascist expansionism to early ideological elements in the worldviews of the two leaders, thus highlighting a degree of internal consistency in their objectives and policies. On the other hand, accusations of reading history backwards attacked the notion that either the alliance or recourse to war had been pre-determined by any programmatic core in the expansionist policies of the two regimes. The notion of a consistent programme of expansion has been contrasted with the view that the drive to large-scale territorial aggrandisement and war was determined by either opportunism or social imperialism, or both. At the same time, even the originality of fascist foreign policies has been questioned. The debate about the continuities between liberal and fascist expansionist programmes revolves around similar questions - did the fascist take-over mark a break with previous foreign policies, sponsoring a new vision and style of expansion, or did it simply reproduce traditional great-power objectives, albeit couched in a more dynamic fashion?

Overall, the existing literature has treated the two regimes rather differently. The Nazi regime has been regarded as more ideological and consistent in its

expansionist pursuits¹. Hitler's fanatical exposition in *Mein Kampf* and his unwavering commitment to rearmament and reckless activism have formed the basis of the so-called intentionalist approach. H. Trevor-Roper's rigid conception of Hitler's ideology as a "blueprint for power"² was followed by K. Hildebrand's and A. Hillgruber's notion of a "stage-by-stage" plan for territorial expansion³. G. Schubert located the ideological origins of Hitler's foreign policy in the 1920s, a view shared by G. Stoakes who regarded the 1919-1925 period as pivotal for the evolution of Hitler's worldview⁴. Even more flexible intentionalist arguments, such as A. Bullock's distinction between "consistent aims" and "opportunistic methods", underlined how such ideological aims underpinned the regime's foreign policy-making and were never contradicted by tactical vacillations⁵. However, the intentionalist orthodoxy has been challenged from a variety of viewpoints. A. J. P. Taylor's classic and controversial account denied any ideological substance in Nazi foreign policy, arguing instead that expansionist goals were shaped according to traditionally German objectives and were pursued in reaction to inauspicious international developments⁶. H. Rauschning and H. Mommsen share the conviction that Nazi foreign policy originated from an unprincipled and blind pursuit of absolute power, devoid of any particular objective or strategy⁷. H. Mommsen also underlined

¹ The best overall discussion of the different interpretations of Nazi foreign policy is to be found in Kershaw, I., *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London 1989, 2nd edition), Ch. 6. See also Williamson, D. G., *The Third Reich* (Harlow 1995, 2nd ed.), pp. 49-77

² Trevor-Roper, H. R. (ed.), *The Table Talk of Adolf Hitler, 1941-1944* (London 1953)

³ Hildebrand, K., *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP und die koloniale Frage 1919-1945* (Munich 1969); and "Hitlers 'Programm' und seine Realisierung, 1939-1942", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland, und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 63-93; Hillgruber, A., *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung, 1940-1941* (Frankfurt 1965)

⁴ Schubert, G., *Anfänge Nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik* (Cologne 1961); Stoakes, G., "The Evolution of Hitler's Ideas on Foreign Policy, 1919-1925", in Stachura, P. D. (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London 1978), pp. 22-47

⁵ Bullock, A., "Hitler and the Origins of the Second World War", in Robertson, E. M. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1971), pp. 189-224

⁶ Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1961). For a discussion of his views see Wippermann, W., *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse* (Berlin 1997), pp. 61f

⁷ Rauschning, H., *The Revolution of Nihilism* (New York 1939); "Ausnahmezustand als Herrschaftstechnik des Nationalsozialistischen Regimes", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 30-45, and "National Socialism: Continuity and Change", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (London 1979), pp. 151-192

the social imperialist function of territorial expansion, especially in appeasing the radicalism of the Nazi party old fighters, while T. Mason echoed a similar argument when he described Hitler's foreign policy as a reaction to domestic pressures in a "barbaric variant of social imperialism". According to Mason, these internal deadlocks prompted a radicalisation in the Nazi expansionist policies which culminated in the invasion of Poland as a desperate move to divert attention from the terminal crisis of the German economy in 1939⁸.

By contrast, the "traditional" interpretation of the Italian Fascist foreign policy has underlined the opportunistic, non-programmatic and diversionary character of Mussolini's expansionist plans⁹. Total rejection of the notion of a programme forms the basis of G. Salvemini's classic accounts, which emphasise both the improvising and the propagandistic nature of the *Duce's* foreign policy-making¹⁰. Similar views have been echoed by D. Mack Smith, who dismissed Mussolini as a "cloud-cuckoo-land" amateur and presented his whole policy as fraudulent¹¹. More moderate was the analysis of E. Di Nolfo, who nevertheless detected no clear ideas in the regime's foreign policy in the 1922-1930 period¹². Social imperialist connotations pervade G. Rochat's extensive writings on Italian Fascist military policy, stressing that expansionist ventures were aimed at increasing the regime's domestic security¹³. In a similar vein, F. Catalano linked the radicalisation of the regime's foreign policy from 1935 onwards with the mounting

⁸ Mason, T., "The Legacy of 1918", in Nicholls, A., Matthias, E. (eds.), *German Democracy and the Triumph of Hitler - Essays in Recent German History* (London 1971), pp. 215-40; "Innere Krise und Angriffskrieg 1938-9", in Forstmeier, F., Volkmann, H. E. (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf 1975), pp. 158-88. For a more detailed discussion of his arguments see, in this study, Ch. 6, Section II

⁹ For a good account of the historiography on Italian fascist foreign policy see Petersen, J., "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra tedeschi e alleati*. Vigezzi, B., *La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 11-56; *Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dall'unità ai giorni nostri. Orientamenti degli studi e prospettiva della ricerca* (Milan 1991), pp. 98ff; Azzi, S. C., "The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy", *The Historical Journal*, 1 (1993), pp. 187-203

¹⁰ Especially, Salvemini, G., *Prelude to the Second World War* (London 1953)

¹¹ Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1982). For an assessment see Finney, P. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1997), pp. 7-8

¹² Di Nolfo, E., *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana 1919-1933* (Padova 1960)

¹³ Amongst others see "Il ruolo delle forze armate nel regime fascista: conclusioni provvisorie e ipotesi di lavoro", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1972), pp. 188-99, esp. p. 101; *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia* (Milan 1971)

economic crisis which hit the country later than other European countries¹⁴. However, a growing number of historians have attempted to overcome the absence of a Mussolinian *Mein Kampf* and to trace an ideological consistency in the regime's foreign policy which could unify the relatively quiet 1920s with the aggressive expansion in the 1930s and the decision to enter the war in 1940. G. Rumi dated the origins of a programme in the early 1920s, while M. Knox and P. Alatri agreed on the existence of a general *disegno finale* (living space in the Mediterranean) which was formulated in the mid-1920s¹⁵. Although most of these approaches acknowledged a high degree of continuity between liberal and Fascist expansionist goals, they attacked the notion that Fascist foreign policy changed objectives and style in the 1930s¹⁶. Instead, they underlined an internal continuity and consistency in Mussolini's revisionist objectives, rejecting the notion that the radicalisation of Fascist expansionism in the 1930s was the result of Nazi influence or mounting domestic deadlocks.

It becomes obvious that any notion of a programmatic foreign policy has to be established against three major objections. The first is that expansion as a policy option had little to do with the general fascist worldview and was mainly useful as a tool for diversion. The second is that the two fascist leaders were not in a strong position domestically which would enable them to shape and dictate foreign policy according to their beliefs and visions. The third is that fascist expansionist policies were dictated by short-term developments and traditional aspirations, thus lacking both internal cohesion and long-term objectives upon which they eventually converged. So far, we have established that expansion had an esoteric value for fascist ideology, as an expression of fascist (and national) superiority and as a process of instilling the new fascist mentality in the population. In this sense,

¹⁴ Catalano, F., *L'economia italiana di guerra. La politica economico-finanziaria del fascismo dalla guerra d'Etiopia alla caduta del regime, 1935-1943* (Milan 1969). For a discussion and rejection of Catalano's economic arguments see Petersen, "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", pp. 47-8

¹⁵ Rumi, G., "'Revisionismo' fascista ed espansione coloniale (1925-1935)", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 435-64; Knox, M., "Conquest, Domestic and Foreign, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 1-57, and "The fascist regime, its foreign policy and its wars: an 'anti-anti-fascist' orthodoxy?", in Finney (ed.), *Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 148-68; Alatri, P., *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome 1963)

¹⁶ This view is expressed mainly by Pastorelli, L., "La storiografia italiana del dopoguerra sulla politica estera", *Storia e Politica*, 10 (1971), pp. 603-49

expansion constituted a goal of the fascist worldview and not just a policy option reduced to diversionary considerations. We have also shown that the charismatic basis of Mussolini's and Hitler's rule remained the sole institutional unifying element of the two fascist regimes until the end. The legal acquisition of power resulted in a polycratic arrangement, in which the fascist parties and the traditional elite groups co-existed in a constantly antagonising relationship. This fact ruled out a monolithic, totalitarian fascist regime but fostered the position and legitimacy of the two leaders in an extreme authoritarian system of rule, in which supreme responsibility for policy-making was the prerogative of the charismatic leaders.

The third objection, however, is strengthened by two indisputable facts. *First*, given the legal acquisition of power in 1922 and 1933, and the co-existence of fascist groups and traditional elites, the foreign policy of the two regimes remained dependent on traditional institutions, processes and even personalities during the long period of fascist consolidation. This points to the direction of a continuity between liberal and fascist foreign policies, at least in the first years of fascist rule, during which the conduct of foreign affairs remained inextricably linked to traditional notions of revisionism, colonialism and irredentism. Even if we accept the existence of a fascist programme of large-scale expansion, such goals had to be deferred for the future in anticipation of more auspicious domestic and international circumstances. Such a dualism, however, between traditional and alleged fascist expansionist objectives renders the notion of an unwavering, concrete programme of fascist expansion problematic¹⁷. *Second*, the fascist take-over did not take place in a political vacuum. Domestic and international factors produced opportunities for, and limitations on, the fascist intentions for expansion. This dialectical relation between intentions and structures makes the idea of a linear unfolding of a programme or "blueprint for action" methodologically unattainable. Short-term vacillations or even contradictions are in ample evidence for both regimes. Hitler's policy towards Poland shifted from the Non-Aggression Pact of 1933 to the compromise offer of 1938-39 and finally invasion, while Mussolini's attitude to Yugoslavia fluctuated between fruitful negotiations in 1924, overt hostility in the 1927-1936 period, the 1937

¹⁷ See the discussion in Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 122-3, 129-30

agreement and finally renewed opposition, culminating in plans for attack during the summer of 1940.

Are we to conclude from these contradictions, as M. Broszat did for Nazi Germany, that they highlight the lack of clear ideological goals in fascist expansion¹⁸? The answer lies in a less rigid definition of the notion of “programme” which distinguishes long-term *ideal* goals from short- or even medium-term tactics and steps. It also presupposes the abandonment of the rigid distinction between traditional and “fascist” foreign-policy objectives. The ideological fusion in the Italian and German Right since the First World War enabled fascist ideology to reproduce traditional “great power” and revisionist themes in a new, dynamic and activist style of policy-making. Fascism’s emphasis on the esoteric value of expansion gradually radicalised the tactics for attaining widely shared goals. At the same time, it aimed to eliminate any political distinction between utopian and realisable objectives, a distinction implicit in the *Realpolitik* of the previous liberal and conservative governments in the two countries. In legitimising the notions of *space* expansion and *historic irredentism*, the fascist regimes introduced territorial expansion as a central element of their worldview. However, in the short-term, foreign policy-making displayed a flexibility and even opportunism which allude to lack of an all-encompassing “programme”. Instead, decision-making remained for a long time circumscribed by domestic and international limitations, adhering to traditional arguments and justifications such as revisionism and irredentism, and thus upholding an impression of continuity.

This is where hindsight becomes a crucial privilege: knowing the ultimate scope of fascist expansionist aspirations (as manifested in the two regimes’ war aims), can it be shown that the short-term expansionist policies of the fascist regimes served an integrated long-term and large-scale vision? The aim of this chapter is to discuss the short-term expansionist initiatives of the Italian and German regimes, and to analyse their experiments with traditional arguments of expansion. Revisionist, irredentist and colonial policies will be examined separately in order to highlight the function and importance of each form in the overall fascist expansionist policies. In

¹⁸ Broszat, M., “Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus”, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18 (1970), pp. 392-409

the context of this analysis, two questions will be addressed. First, how innovative or not were the foreign policies of the two regimes in comparison with traditional expansionist aspirations? Second, to what extent can we integrate the revisionist, irredentist and colonial goals pursued by the two regimes into a consistent, large-scale expansionist vision which underpinned the foreign-policy decisions of the two regimes and was not contradicted in the long term by diplomatic flexibility or opportunism?

II. Revisionism: the legacy of the Peace Treaties and the juridical argument for territorial expansion

From the outset it became clear that the Peace Treaties had failed to base the postwar settlement upon a stable compromise between the conflicting claims of the European states. Strong feelings of dissatisfaction were common not only among the defeated, but also in the case of victorious or newly founded states. While the former had anticipated a conciliatory peace with mild territorial terms, the latter's expectations had been so inflated after the victory of the *Entente* powers and the declaration of Wilson's *Fourteen Points*, that it was impossible to be satisfied *in toto* under any conceivable peace plan¹⁹. This concerted attack by winners and losers alike at the Peace Treaties undermined the legitimacy of the postwar settlement and challenged its permanent character. Thus, the notion of *revisionism* was introduced into the political vocabulary of European affairs, becoming a catch-phrase for both territorial losses and unsatisfied promises or claims.

Since the Peace Treaties had intended to provide a definite solution to territorial rivalries in Europe and overseas²⁰, revisionism formed the political platform for a synthesis of the European and colonial policies of the discontented

¹⁹ For the text of Wilson's Fourteen Points see Snyder, L. L., *Historic Documents of World War I* (New York 1958), p. 164; and for his "vision" of a future Europe, Walworth, A., *Wilson and his Peacemakers. American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York & London 1986), pp. 40-63. For the problems involved in the implementation a clear "ethnic" solution to the territorial problems of post-1918 Europe, see Walworth, pp. 435ff; Weinberg, G. L., *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 13ff

²⁰ Foster, A. J., "Britain and East Central Europe, 1918-1948", in Stirk, P. (ed.), *Mitteleuropa. History and Prospects* (Edinburgh 1994), pp. 112-5

states. It managed to adapt the traditional expansionist attitudes to the new circumstances that the end of war and the spirit of the Peace Treaties had established. As an open-ended commitment to future expansion²¹, it succeeded in keeping the whole territorial debate alive and in presenting it as a juridical issue with concrete references to the “unjust” treaty. The previous tensions between colonial and continental expansion were brushed aside in favour of the right to expansion *per se* which seemed to subside in the face of the postwar exhaustion and craving for security. The discontented states exploited the plurality of their expansionist claims to achieve revision of the Peace Treaties not merely for the sake of specific amendments. Their ultimate goal was to deconstruct the *permanent* character of the settlement and to create a precedent for future, more concrete expansion. In this sense, revisionism should not be seen as either a form, or an autonomous goal, of expansion. It was rather a political and judicial excuse to re-legitimise the right to expansion in all its diverse forms (colonialism, irredentism, prestige expansionism etc.) in a manner that was politically relevant to, and acceptable in, the postwar circumstances.

The Versailles settlement was regarded as a setback for the expansionist aspirations of Italy and Germany for entirely different reasons²². As the main defeated nation of the First World War, Germany saw its territory reduced in two ways. First, as a result of the application of the concept of self-determination, she was forced to concede vast areas of her pre-1914 national territory to the victorious powers and the new states of central Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia). She lost the province of Alsace-Lorraine to France, nearly the whole of west Prussia to the resurrected Polish state, the Memel area to Lithuania, and small western districts to

²¹ von Strandmann, H. P., “Imperialism and Revisionism in Interwar Germany”, in Mommsen, W. J., Osterhammel, J. (eds.), *Imperialism and After. Continuities and Discontinuities* (London, Boston & Sydney 1986), p. 93.

²² For a discussion of the territorial implications of the Versailles Treaty upon postwar Germany see Weinberg, G. L., *Germany, Hitler, and World War*, pp. 11-22, who also underlines that anti-Versailles feelings in Germany were grossly exaggerated, as the Treaty itself still left Germany in a privileged position in Europe [op. cit., pp. 19-22]. Cf. a similar assessment of the Treaty in Matthias, “Influence of Versailles”, pp. 11-28. In my view, however, both approaches miss a crucial psychological point: namely, that the German “defeat” never became obvious to the German population, and thus the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty were seen as exceptionally harsh, punitive and artificial.

Belgium²³. Furthermore, the Rhineland area was demilitarised in order to strengthen the security of France's eastern frontier with Germany²⁴. At the same time, Germany had to accept the geographical separation of East Prussia from the rest of Germany due to the establishment of the so-called Polish Corridor, linking mainland Poland with the "Free City" of Danzig²⁵. The treaty also acknowledged the independent character of Austria, thus rejecting the German claim for a union between the two states²⁶. Finally, the Saar territory was placed under international control for a period of fifteen years (with the provision for a plebiscite after fifteen years)²⁷, while other plebiscites in North Schleswig²⁸ and Upper Silesia²⁹ determined the extent of the territories that were to be ceded from Germany to Denmark and Poland respectively. In the field of colonies, the Weimar Republic was forced to renounce all her rights over all her colonial possessions. The German colonial argument had been significantly weakened by the German military defeats in Africa during the First World War, defeats that had resulted in a virtual territorial decimation of her colonial empire³⁰. On top of that, the *Entente* powers used as a pretext the accusation that Germany had proved incapable of administering colonies (the "Colonial Guilt" clause³¹), and distributed the former German colonies to Britain, France, Belgium,

²³ Sharp, pp. 104-6

²⁴ For an account of the compromise on the Rhineland issue at Paris see McCrum, R., "French Rhineland Policy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919", *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), pp. 623-48

²⁵ On the settlement of the differences between Germany and the Polish delegation see Lundgreen-Nielsen, K., *The Polish Issue at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study of the Policies of the Great Powers and the Poles, 1918-1919* (Odense 1979).

²⁶ Stadler, K. S., *The Birth of the Austrian Republic, 1918-1921* (Leyden 1968); Meyer, H. C., *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague 1955), pp. 291-310; Low, A. P., *The Anschluss Movement 1918-1919 and the Paris Peace Conference* (Philadelphia 1974); Howard, "The Legacy", p. 48

²⁷ Nelson, H. I., *Land and Power. British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-1919* (London 1963), pp. 272-81

²⁸ Temperley, vol. 2 (London 1920), pp. 203ff

²⁹ Campbell, F. G., "The Struggle for Upper Silesia, 1919-1922", *Journal of Modern History*, 42 (1970), pp. 361-85

³⁰ Henderson, W. O., *The German Colonial Empire, 1884-1919* (London 1993), pp. 117-33; Stoecker, H. (ed.), *German Imperialism in Africa. From the Beginnings until the Second World War* (New Jersey 1986), pp. 270-96; Louis, *Great Britain and Colonies*, pp. 50ff

³¹ See Schmokel, W. W., *Dream of Empire. German Colonialism, 1919-1945* (New Haven and London 1964), pp. 64ff; Dockrill, M. L., Goold, J. D., *Peace without Promise. Great Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-1923* (London 1981), pp. 64-8; Sharp, p. 165

Japan, Australia, south Africa and New Zealand in the form of “mandates” from the League of Nations³².

In contrast to Germany, postwar Italy - as a nominal victor - made modest gains in the Peace Conferences. After long and difficult negotiations she secured the extension of her northern frontier up to the strategic Brenner Pass. This meant that not only the territories of Trento, but also a large part of the South Tyrol region - with a German-speaking majority - were incorporated into the Italian state³³. Additionally, in 1920 Italy signed the Treaty of Rapallo with Yugoslavia, under which she secured moderate territorial gains in Istria, Zara and Dalmatia³⁴. Furthermore, the Italian government succeeded in securing her position in the Aegean Sea, by extending her occupation of the Dodecanese and by acquiring control of the Adalia “sphere of influence” in Asia Minor under the Treaty of Sèvres (1920)³⁵. Even after the triumph of nationalist Turkey in 1922, and the consequent overthrow of the 1920 Treaty³⁶, Italy successfully defended her right over the Dodecanese.

At the same time, however, the territorial gains from the Peace Treaties fell significantly short of the expectations which had prompted the Salandra government to enter the war in 1915. The London Treaty of 1915 included provisions for substantial territorial compensations in Europe and Africa which were not fully realised in the postwar negotiations³⁷. The *Entente* powers could not disregard the

³² Sharp, pp. 163-5

³³ On the significance of Italy's northern frontier see Anderson, M., *Frontiers. Territory and State in the Modern World* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 45-8. For the negotiations for the Brenner see Temperley, vol. 4, pp. 278-95

³⁴ Albrecht-Carrié, R., *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York 1966), pp. 114ff. For the inconclusive Italo-Yugoslav negotiations at Paris see Temperley, 4, pp. 296-326; and pp. 327-37, for Rapallo.

³⁵ Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, New Jersey 1970), pp. 21-3 ; Smith, M. L., *The Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor* (London 1973) , pp. 68-82, 129; Helmreich, P. C., *From Paris to Sevres. The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conferences of 1919-1920* (Columbus 1974), pp. 314-37

³⁶ For the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 see Cassels, pp. 21-45; Walworth, pp. 351-5; Smith, M. L., *Ionian Vision*, pp. 266-336

³⁷ See Lowe, Marzari, Ch. 7; Saladino, S., “Italy”, in Rogger, H., Weber, E. (eds.), *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (London 1965), pp. 249-53

new reality on the east coast of Adriatic with the formation of the Yugoslav state³⁸. They were also reluctant to give up their predominant position in the Mediterranean by conceding part of their colonial possessions in north Africa to Italy, despite their promises for colonial compensation in 1915. Orlando, on the other hand, went to Paris with a programme of territorial claims that not only took the London Treaty for granted, but also succumbed to the nationalist propaganda by adding Fiume to the long list of Italian demands³⁹. In these circumstances, it is easy to understand the Italian resentment at the decision, first, to establish Fiume as a Free State under the Rapallo Treaty of 1920⁴⁰ and, second, to exclude the issue of the Italian colonies from the final treaties. The occupation of Fiume by D'Annunzio in September 1919 was the first ominous indication of Italian revisionist aspirations⁴¹. Such was the annexationist fervour in postwar Italy that the dissatisfaction for the unfulfilled territorial claims totally overshadowed the enthusiasm for victory and the Brenner issue⁴².

A detailed account of Italian and German revisionist activities prior to the advent of the PNF and NSDAP to power does not lie within the limits of this study. In Italy, this period was a short interlude, fraught with social divisions and economic encumbrances which kept the liberal governments occupied with the task of domestic consolidation rather than with any serious effort to advance revisionist plans. In the field of foreign policy, the 1918-1922 liberal *interregnum* was marked by endeavours to defend the precarious postwar territorial gains and to stabilise Italy's new international position in Europe and the Mediterranean. It was a period of normalisation in her relations with Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece and the western powers⁴³. At the same time, the Fascist movement emerged as the fiercest vocal critic

³⁸ On the attitudes of the Great Powers towards Yugoslavia see Sharp, pp. 135-42. On the claims of the Yugoslav side see Lederer, I. J., *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Study in Frontiermaking* (Yale 1963)

³⁹ De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 102-5

⁴⁰ Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History*, pp. 231ff. For a nationalist contemporary view, see Federzoni, L., *Il trattato di Rapallo. Con un'appendice di documenti* (Bologna 1921)

⁴¹ Ledeen, M. A., *The First Duce* (Baltimore & London 1977); Clark, pp. 203-5

⁴² Howard, "The Legacy", pp. 50-1; Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History*, pp. 100-3, 141-9

⁴³ See Hughes, S., "The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism: 1922-1932", in Craig, G., Gilbert, F. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats 1919-1939* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 210-4; Knox, M., "Il fascismo e la politica estera italiana", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S., *La politica estera italiana (1860-*

of the foreign policy strategy of the Italian liberal governments and formally introduced the claim for *revision* of the peace settlement⁴⁴. The occupation of Fiume by D'Annunzio was eventually suppressed by the new Giolittian administration in 1920, but this show of strength did not silence the nationalist and Fascist propaganda, which kept up the pressure for a "just" regulation of the Dalmatian issue⁴⁵. In Germany, on the other hand, Weimar revisionism covered a significantly longer period (1919-1932). Such was, however, the extent of the country's postwar problems and restrictions under the Versailles settlement that territorial revisionism presupposed advances in four more basic forms of revision: economic, against reparations; diplomatic, against isolation and exclusion from the international system; legal, against Germany's inequality of rights; and military, against the massive restrictions on the armed forces. The moderate policies of Stresemann made significant advances in all four fields, but peaceful revisionism failed to deliver any tangible gains with regard to the territorial issue⁴⁶. By 1933 the Weimar governments had managed to free the country from most of its previous legal and economic restrictions; yet Germany still remained confined within the humiliating territorial arrangement of 1919⁴⁷.

1985) (Bologna 1991), pp. 290f; Albrecht-Carrié, R., *Italy from Napoleon to Mussolini* (New York 1950), pp. 190-6

⁴⁴ Di Nolfo, A., *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana 1919-1933* (Padova 1960), pp. 12ff; OO, XIII, 154; XIV, 213-4; XVIII, 416

⁴⁵ On the removal of D'Annunzio from Fiume, see Ledeen, *First Duce*, pp. 187ff; Clark, pp. 204-5. Note, however, Mussolini's cool attitude towards D'Annunzio in late 1919-early 1920 [Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 17-21]

⁴⁶ For a concise analysis of the Weimar foreign policy see Hiden, J. W., *The Weimar Republic* (London 1974), pp. 25-31. See also Jacobson, J., *Locarno Diplomacy* (Princeton, New Jersey 1972); Lee, M. M., Michalka, W., *German Foreign Policy 1917-1933* (Leamington Spa, Hamburg & New York 1987), pp. 112-48. For the role of Stresemann in German revisionism see Bretton, H. L., *Stresemann and the Revision of Versailles* (Stanford 1953); Zimmermann, L., *Deutsche Aussenpolitik in der Ära der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin & Frankfurt 1958); Gatske, H. W., *Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany* (Baltimore 1954)

⁴⁷ On the connection between the failure of the Weimar Republic to amend the territorial clauses of the Versailles Treaty and the demise of Republic, see Zimmermann, *passim*. Cf. Matthias, "Influence of Versailles", p. 23

Italy: Revisionist policies

The Fascist episode in European politics started with the March on Rome in October 1922. As Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of a government with high nationalist credentials, Mussolini realised the priority of dealing with the complications of the Peace Treaties in a manner suggestive of the regime's dynamism⁴⁸. He was also conscious, however, of two main limitations on his revisionist aspirations. The first pertained to the necessity to reassure foreign governments and international public opinion about the law-abiding intentions of the new Fascist government⁴⁹. The second was related to the reluctance of the major pro-status quo powers in Europe (namely Britain and France) to discuss any revision of the postwar settlement, especially after such difficult and time-consuming negotiations. These two considerations seemed to prevail in the first year of Fascist rule, and Mussolini hastened to affirm his respect for the Peace Treaties in his first foreign policy speech to the Chamber and again throughout the first half of 1923. He concluded, however, with an ominous remark about the ephemeral character of treaties in general, and this reflected his long-term unwillingness to accept the postwar settlement as a definite territorial solution to Italy's aspirations⁵⁰.

There were two categories of territorial issues that the new Italian government could include in its revisionist agenda. The conclusion of the Peace Treaties in 1920 had still left a number of territorial questions pending for a future solution. Of particular interest to Italy's expansionist aspirations were the issues pertaining to the final adjustment of the Italo-Yugoslav border⁵¹, to the Italo-Turkish-

⁴⁸ Mack Smith, D., *Italy* (Ann Harbor 1969), p. 446; De Felice, R., "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 488f

⁴⁹ The reactions of the foreign governments to the appointment of Mussolini were mixed. See Cassels, pp. 3-18, DDI, 7th, I, 38/50/84/127/130; Orsini, F. G., "La diplomazia", in Del Boca, A., Legnani, M., Rossi, M. C. (eds.), *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia* (Rome & Bari 1995), pp. 285f; Di Nolfo, A., "L'opinione pubblica europea e l'ascesa di Mussolini", *Il Mulino*, 10 (1954), pp. 635-47

⁵⁰ The speech is printed in *Atti del Parlamento italiano. Camera dei deputati. Sessione 1921-23. Legislatura XXVI. Discussioni* (Rome 1923), vol. IX, pp. 8389-94, and reprinted in Mussolini, B., *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini* (Milan 1934-1939), III, pp. 59-73. For a translation of the most important excerpts see Delzell, C. F. (ed.), *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919-1945* (New York, Evanston & London 1970), pp. 45-51. See also Hughes, S., pp. 216ff

⁵¹ For an general analysis of the Italo-Yugoslav frontier see Moodie, A. E., *The Italo-Yugoslav Boundary* (London 1945). The postwar negotiations for the issue of Dalmatia, Istria and Fiume are also dealt with in Reichman, S., Golan, A., "Irredentism and Boundary Adjustments in Post-World

Greek dispute over the sovereignty of the Dodecanese⁵², and finally to the colonial compensation which had been promised to Italy under the London Treaty⁵³. The postwar liberal governments had dealt with the first two questions, yet the settlements remained inconclusive at the time of Mussolini's appointment. The Santa Margherita Accords, adjusting territorial issues in the area surrounding Fiume⁵⁴, were handed over to the new Fascist government for final ratification. Mussolini honoured his promise to respect the concluded treaties and ratified the accords in February 1923, but refused to sanction the secret protocol. This complication laid the foundations for the re-examination of the Italo-Yugoslav frontier in 1923. With regard to the issue of the Dodecanese, there was the Italo-Greek agreements of 1919-20, according to which the islands (except Rhodes) were to be ceded to Greece⁵⁵. This had been cancelled by the Treaty of Sèvres, which reaffirmed the temporary sovereignty of Italy over the Dodecanese⁵⁶. By the time of Mussolini's appointment, however, the resurgence of nationalist Turkey in Asia Minor had completely overthrown all previous adjustments and the whole question of the Aegean Sea was opened again for negotiations. By contrast, the issue of deciding the extent of Italy's colonial compensation in Africa had not received any concrete response up to October 1922, given the evasive attitude of the British and French governments⁵⁷. Italy's *Entente* partners had no intention of sharing their joint domination of the

War I Europe", in Chazan, N. (ed.), *Irredentism and International Politics* (London 1991), pp. 57-61; Dockrill, Goold, *Peace without Promise*, pp. 105-10; Lowe, Marzari, Chs. 7-8

⁵² A general analysis of the negotiations on the issue of the Dodecanese is provided by Lowe, Marzari, pp. 186-91. For the handling of the issue by the fascist government see Cassels, Chs. 1, 4, 10. The Greek claims over the Dodecanese at the Paris Peace Conference are discussed in Smith, M. L., *Ionian Vision*, pp. 72-4.

⁵³ The text of the Treaty of London has been translated and reprinted in Clough, S. B., Saladino, S. (eds.), *A History of Modern Italy. Documents, Readings and Commentary* (New York and London 1968), pp. 308-17

⁵⁴ On the agreements of 1920 between Italy and Yugoslavia see Lederer, pp. 246ff; Temperley, 4, pp. 307ff; Moodie, pp. 173-6. Due to the compromise on the issue of Fiume, it was understandable that the nationalist-fascist opposition to the liberal government was united in attacking the Rapallo concessions. See De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 117f; Salvatorelli, L., Mira, G., *Storia dell'Italia nel periodo fascista* (Turin 1957), pp. 153ff]

⁵⁵ Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History*, p. 190; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 54-5. The Agreement had united the nationalist right against concessions to Italy's neighbours. See De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, Ch. 7

⁵⁶ The course of negotiations which led to the Treaty of Sevres is documented in Helmreich, Ch. XIV. Especially for the renunciation of the Venizelos-Tittoni agreement, see p. 320.

⁵⁷ Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 54ff. This explains Mussolini's pressure immediately after the March for a colonial mandate [DDI, 7th, I, 141/159]

Mediterranean with any other state, even less so with a Fascist state. Therefore, between 1922 and 1924 they refused Italy either a settlement on the issue of the Italian minority in Tunisia, or a prestigious Italian participation in the negotiations for the future status of Tangier⁵⁸. The loss of the Adalia “sphere of influence” in Asia Minor under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) was a further blow to the Italian dreams for domination of eastern Mediterranean. It strengthened, however, the Italian argument for colonial compensation and became the sharp edge of Fascist propaganda against Britain and France for concessions in Africa⁵⁹.

Mussolini’s revisionist policies delivered tangible gains in all three fronts. The re-negotiation of the Italo-Yugoslav frontier produced the Rome Protocols of January 1924, according to which Italy acquired control of the city of Fiume by granting the surrounding territories to Yugoslavia. There was no real concession there - these same territories had been initially granted to Yugoslavia under the secret protocol of the Santa Margherita Accords, which Mussolini had refused to ratify⁶⁰. This was the first victory of Italian revisionism, not only against the new state of Yugoslavia but also against the French concept of security in the Balkans and the Adriatic. It was also a symbolic triumph for the Fascist regime on the highly emotive issue of Dalmatia-Istria which had become the cornerstone of Italian irredentism since the beginning of the twentieth century⁶¹. The Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement was achieved through the co-operation between Mussolini and Salvatore Contarini, Under-Secretary to the Foreign Ministry. Although he was the main representative of the liberal diplomatic establishment, Contarini had kept his position after the March on Rome and succeeded in exercising a restraining influence on Mussolini’s reckless expansionist ambitions⁶².

Furthermore, the Treaty of Lausanne sanctioned the continuing occupation of the Dodecanese by Italy, thus annulling the 1919 Tittoni-Venizelos agreement for the

⁵⁸ Cassels, pp. 201-15; Mack Smith, D., *Le guerre di Mussolini* (Rome & Bari 1976), pp. 43-58

⁵⁹ Cassels, p. 218. For the origins of the Italian infiltration in Asia Minor prior to the First World War, see, in this study, Ch. 1, Section V

⁶⁰ Moodie, pp. 203f; Cassels, pp. 127-45; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 170ff

⁶¹ For the importance of Adriatic irredentism in Italian nationalism see Vivante, A., *Irredentismo Adriatico* (Florence 1954); De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, Ch. 6; Webster, *passim*, esp. pp. 333ff

return of the islands (except Rhodes) to Greece⁶³. The most important victory, however, for the Italian regime was the decision of the new British government to cede an extensive part of the Jubaland district (between Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya) to Italy in early 1924, and then Jarabub (between Egypt and Libya) in 1925. This was a success not simply in territorial and colonial terms, but primarily as a manifestation of the Fascist regime's diplomatic consolidation in the European system⁶⁴. Under this agreement Britain gave up a previous crucial precondition for colonial concessions to Italy: the return of the Dodecanese, or part of them, to Greece⁶⁵. The cession of Jubaland regardless of the fate of the Dodecanese ensured a prestige victory for Italian colonial revisionism not only in east Africa but also in the neuralgic part of the eastern Mediterranean. Finally, the Italo-Albanian Treaty of 1927 re-established Italian influence over the region after the much-criticised decision of the liberal administration to withdraw the troops from Valona in 1920⁶⁶.

In general, Mussolini's revisionist policies added very little to the traditional ambitions of Italian diplomacy for border readjustments in the Balkans and in Africa. The successes in Fiume, the Dodecanese, Jarabub and Jubaland were endorsed by the diplomatic establishment as constructive steps in the direction of strengthening Italy's influence in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. This impression of continuity was reinforced after Mussolini's adherence to the Locarno Pacts of 1925 and the absence of aggressive expansionist ventures during the so-called "decade of good behaviour" until 1935. At the same time, Mussolini's highly selective and inconsistent invocation of the revisionist principle has been criticised by historians as

⁶² On the role of Contarini see Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 290-1; Orsini, pp. 285f; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 48-51, 167

⁶³ Cassels, pp. 21-22; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 173-5

⁶⁴ The origins of this agreement are to be found in the Milner-Scialoja agreement of 1920, which related the compensation to Italy under Art. 13 of the Treaty of London to the cession of Jubaland and Jarabub. See Cassels, pp. 216-8; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 147ff; Hughes, S., pp. 221-2. For the positive reception of this development by the traditional diplomats, see Guariglia, R., *Ricordi* (Naples 1950), pp. 22ff, 35-6

⁶⁵ On the British proposal for a *quid pro quo* between Jubaland and part of the Dodecanese see DDI, 7th, II, 513-4. Mussolini replied negatively (II, 532). For the negotiations between the two sides see Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 112-4. See also the text of the final agreement in DDI, 7th, III, 388

⁶⁶ For the Italo-Albanian negotiations see Veneruso, D., *L'Italia fascista, 1922-1945* (Bologna 1981), pp. 137-45; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 173-95.

evidence of the absence of a coherent expansionist strategy⁶⁷. Such a reading, however, overlooks two major factors. First, the *Duce* showed little interest in the normative value of revisionism as a principle for border readjustment. His endorsement of anti-Versailles rhetoric was circumscribed by his perception of Italy's strategic and security interests. This meant that he was determined not only to pursue the Adriatic claims of the revisionist argument but also to encourage other countries (for example, Hungary) in their revisionist aspirations⁶⁸, but also to oppose the same principle regarding the sensitive issue of the *Anschluss*, which could jeopardise Italy's security at the Brenner. Second, Mussolini's ambitions in the Adriatic and the wider Mediterranean basin went beyond what the traditional revisionist agenda could justify as legitimate territorial readjustments. The violent occupation of Corfu in August 1923 was not simply "a colossal error of miscalculation and blind ambition"⁶⁹; it was decided before the assassination of Tellini and provided Italy with the ultimate control point to the whole of the Adriatic Sea. Mussolini's subsequent policy of *penetration pacifique* in Albania and his ambition to provoke an internal collapse in Yugoslavia revealed his long-term intention to establish a virtual monopoly of power in the Adriatic and the Balkans. Such an objective implied a radical reorientation of Italian foreign policy towards the Balkan states which included traditional revisionist claims but was by no means confined to them.

Germany: revisionism

In contrast to the Italian case, the revisionist policies of the Nazi regime in Germany after 1933 took place in a completely different diplomatic context. Hitler had to take into account two severe limitations on his anti-Versailles plans. The first limitation concerned the inauspicious diplomatic and military position of post-1918 Germany. With the Locarno Treaty, the Disarmament Conference and the plans for

⁶⁷ Salvemini, G., *Prelude to the Second World War* (London 1953), pp. 353f; Hughes, S., "The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism: 1922-1932", in Craig, G., Gilbert, F. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats 1919-1939* (Princeton, NJ 1953), pp. 223-5; Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica*, pp. 87ff

⁶⁸ Hughes, pp. 224f; Lowe, Marzari, Ch. 11

the amendment of the reparations obligations, the policies of the Weimar Republic had improved Germany's standing in the international system⁷⁰. They had failed, however, to achieve either equality of rights or the restoration of the country's military potential. This double reality meant that the new Nazi government had both limited diplomatic margins for peaceful revision and still no chance of success should it choose to resort to forceful changes of the Versailles status quo. The second limitation originated from the unfavourable international attitudes and reactions to the intentions of the new Nazi regime in Germany. If the British and French governments had been sceptical, or even irritated, at Italy's great-power aspirations in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, they were now significantly more alarmed at the rise to power of a politician who had never concealed his determination to shatter the Versailles Treaty and reclaim Germany's lost power. At the same time, the Italian Fascist leadership continued to have mixed feelings about the restoration of the Reich's position in the European system. Although a possible ally in exercising pressure over France, a strong Germany represented a tangible threat to Italy's position in central Europe and the Balkans. As Mussolini was moving to a pro-status quo attitude in 1933-4⁷¹, Hitler's gambles on the sensitive issue of Austria in July 1934 turned Italy from a possible (and future) partner in revisionism into a temporary opponent⁷².

Despite these limitations, Hitler could take advantage of a much more developed revisionist conscience in 1933, not only among the discontented nations but also among the guarantors of the postwar territorial settlement. The careful handling of the revisionist issue by the Weimar Republic, and the progress in all

⁶⁹ Salvemini, G., *Mussolini Diplomatico* (Bari 1952), pp. 382-3

⁷⁰ On the importance of the Locarno Treaty for German foreign policy see Zimmermann, Ch. VII. For Germany's position in the Disarmament Conference see Craig, G., "The German Foreign Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop", in Craig, Gilbert (eds.), pp. 409-14; Heineman, J. L., *Hitler's Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (London 1979), pp. 51-8. For the issue of reparations see Helbig, W., *Die Reparationen in der Ära Brüning* (Berlin 1962). Generally, see Kaiser, D. E., "Hitler and the Coming of the War", in Martel, G. (ed.), *Modern Germany Reconsidered* (London & New York 1992), p. 180

⁷¹ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 223ff

⁷² On the Vienna putsch and Mussolini's angry reaction, see Jagschitz, G. *Die Nationalsozialisten 1934 in Österreich* (Graz 1976); Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, p. 98; DDI, 7th, III, 781/787; Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 132, 5; Vogelsang, T., "Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 (1954), pp. 432-4

other directions except for the territorial issue⁷³, had greatly legitimised Germany's claims for the return of, at least part of her pre-1914 territories, in Europe and overseas⁷⁴. Moreover, the revisionist experiments of Fascist Italy in the 1920s had exposed the difficulties in defending the postwar settlement as a definite territorial solution for the European system. Consequently, the Versailles status quo had become much less unassailable in 1933 than it was, or had appeared to be in the previous decade. This was something that even Britain and, to a lesser extent, France had come to acknowledge, first on the issue of reparations and then in the question of equality of legal and military rights. Undoubtedly, the transition from legal to territorial revisionism proved significantly more time-consuming for interwar Germany. By 1935, however, re-adjustments in all other aspects of the postwar settlement had resulted in a restoration of Germany's power, so that territorial revision ceased to be a purely juridical matter. Nazi Germany now possessed both the diplomatic status to pursue peaceful revisionism *and* the economic-military potential to expand by force. This was the main consideration behind the shift in British and, later, French foreign policies to tolerance and appeasement from the mid-1930s onwards⁷⁵.

In purely territorial terms, Nazi revisionism adhered to the traditional lines of the policy sponsored by the *Wilhelmstrasse* and the *Reichswehr* leadership throughout the Weimar Republic⁷⁶. Bülow's April 1933 Declaration of Principles

⁷³ Zimmermann, Chs. VI, IX-XII

⁷⁴ On the German "legal" arguments against the colonial provisions of the Versailles Treaty see Schmokel, pp. 1-17, 76-87; von Strandmann, "Imperialism and Revisionism", pp. 94ff. From the contemporary literature see, among others, Townsend, M. E. "The Contemporary Colonial Movement in Germany", *Political Science Quarterly*, 43 (1928), pp. 64-75; Dix, A., *Weltkrise und Kolonialpolitik* (Berlin 1932).

⁷⁵ See a number of articles on British and French appeasement policies in Mommsen, W. J., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983). Especially, Douglas, R., "Chamberlain and Appeasement", pp. 79-88; Parker, R. A. C., "The Failure of Collective Security in British Appeasement", pp. 22-9; Frankenstein, R., "The Decline of France and French Appeasement", pp. 236-45. See also Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 109-11

⁷⁶ Michalka, W., "Die nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik im Zeichen eines 'Konzeptionen-Pluralismus' - Fragestellungen und Forschungsaufgaben", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 53-4; Hillgruber, A., "Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der deutschen Aussenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler", in Hillgruber (ed.), *Grossmachtpolitik und Militarismus im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf 1974), pp. 22ff; Nipperdey, T., "1933 and the Continuity of German History", in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London 1985), pp. 489-508

described the revision of the Versailles Treaty as Germany's "most pressing concern". Priority was given to the "transformation of the Eastern Frontier" at the expense of more far-reaching changes (such as the *Anschluss*), which presupposed a radical international realignment. At the same time, however, the Memorandum placed primary emphasis on the need to "recover our [military and economic] power" by pursuing a consistent policy of rearmament and exploiting "the most favourable moment for the revision of each particular part of the treaty"⁷⁷. After 1933, conscription was regarded as a necessary prerequisite for rebuilding the power of the *Reichswehr* by the military leadership, given the anticipation of failure at the Disarmament Conference at Geneva⁷⁸. Furthermore, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, a traditional objective of German revisionism since Locarno, constituted a medium-term priority for both the army and the *Wilhelmstrasse* in order to strengthen German security vis-à-vis France⁷⁹.

After his appointment as Chancellor in January 1933, Hitler exploited every opportunity to reassure military and diplomatic circles about his cautious revisionism intentions. In the famous speech to the *Reichswehr* Generals in early February 1933, he described rearmament as the "most important prerequisite for achieving ... political power" with a view to conducting a "battle against Versailles"⁸⁰. The

⁷⁷ For the Memorandum see Wollstein, G., "Eine Denkschrift des Staatssekretärs Bernhard von Bülow vom März 1933. Wilhelminische Konzeption der Aussenpolitik zu Beginn der Nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft", *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 1 (1973), pp. 77ff; Krüger, P., Hahn, E. J. C., "Der Loyalitätskonflikt des Staatssekretärs von Bülow im Frühjahr 1933", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 20 (1972), p. 376-410; Michalka, "Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik", pp. 56ff. A translation of its important points may be found in Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism. A Documentary Reader*, vol. III: *Foreign Policy. War and Racial Extermination* (Exeter 1988), pp. 653-7. See also Michalka, W., "Conflicts within the German Leadership on the Objectives and Tactics of German Foreign Policy, 1933-1939", in Mommsen, W. J., Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983), pp. 50ff; and the translation of the excerpts used above in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 653ff

⁷⁸ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 632-3; Deist, W., Messerschmidt, M., Volkmann, H.-E., Wette, W., "Causes and Preconditions of German Aggression", in Deist, W. (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa 1985), pp. 336-53, here pp. 343f

⁷⁹ Heinemann, J. L., *Hitler's First Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1979), pp. 110ff; ADAP, C, II, 452; Laffan, M., "Weimar and Versailles: German Foreign Policy, 1919-33", in Laffan (ed.), *The Burden of German History, 1919-1945* (London 1989), pp. 81-102

⁸⁰ Vogelsang, T., "Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930-1933", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 (1954), p. 435, excerpts of which are translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 628-9. See also "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", in Laqueur, W., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 142f

withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October 1933 was the culmination of a consistently obstructive Germany policy throughout 1933 which was master-minded by the *Wilhelmstrasse* and was endorsed by the military leadership⁸¹. Neurath had never concealed his dislike of the League, and Blomberg continued to press Hitler for an immediate withdrawal from Geneva⁸². Ironically, the particular timing of the decision to withdraw is the only case in which Hitler postponed, rather than pushed forward, a foreign policy initiative. His reluctance to sanction an earlier withdrawal stemmed not from scepticism about the advisability of this move (he had made his decision clear since May 1933⁸³), but from a determination to avoid negative repercussions from the impression that Germany had deliberately sabotaged the disarmament negotiations⁸⁴. As for the next major revisionist move, namely the introduction of conscription, it took place in early 1935 with the complete agreement of Blomberg and with the tacit approval of the Foreign Office⁸⁵.

However, the real *pièce de résistance* of Nazi revisionism was the unilateral remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936. Given the endorsement of the objective by the military and diplomatic conservative elites, the French-Soviet Pact of 1935 provided Hitler with the diplomatic ammunition to announce the termination of Germany's commitment to the Locarno pacts⁸⁶. This implication was not missed by Neurath who worked consistently throughout 1935 to pave the way for a *diplomatic* solution to the problem of the Rhineland - a solution which was also

⁸¹ Weinberg G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936* (Chicago 1970), pp. 159-67; Wheeler-Bennett, J. W., *The Disarmament Deadlock* (London 1934), pp. 86ff; Craig, G. A., "The German Foreign Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop", in Gilbert, F., Craig, G. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 409-18

⁸² Heinemann, pp. 100f; Geyer, M., "The Dynamics on Military Revisionism in the Interwar Years. Military Politics between Rearmament and Diplomacy", in Deist (ed.), *German Military*, pp. 100-51, here pp. 118-9; Michalka, "Conflicts", pp. 49-50

⁸³ See his speech of that day in Domarus, M., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen*, vol. I: *Triumph (1932-1938)* (Würzburg 1962), pp. 270-9, esp. 278-9

⁸⁴ Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 413ff; Wheeler-Bennett, *Disarmament Deadlock*, pp. 113ff. See also his speech announcing the withdrawal in Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 305-14

⁸⁵ Geyer, "Dynamics of Military Revisionism", pp. 127-8; Heinemann, pp. 110-1. See also, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

⁸⁶ See DBFP, 2nd, VI, pp. 803ff; and, for French fears about the fate of Locarno and German intentions, DDF, 2nd, I, 36

favoured by the *Reichswehr* leadership⁸⁷. Although Hitler eventually decided to overcome the hesitations of Neurath and Blomberg, opting for a speedy military action, Neurath endorsed the move and advocated the completion of the operation in the face of Hitler's temporary panic-attack during the first days of the action⁸⁸.

The continuity between conservative and Nazi revisionist objectives demonstrated in 1933-36 period renders G. Weinberg's description of early Nazi foreign policy as a "diplomatic revolution" rather exaggerated⁸⁹. A. J. P. Taylor used this high degree of conservative consensus until 1936 to make the provocative statement that "Hitler's foreign policy was that of his predecessors, of the professional diplomacy at the Foreign Office and of virtually all Germans"⁹⁰. Even if Taylor overstated the case of continuity, other historians have questioned the originality of Hitler's revisionist policies, highlighting instead the traditional character of its major objectives⁹¹. This impression was further strengthened by the fact that, unlike in Italy, the commitment of the traditional diplomatic and military elites to revisionism was temporary and open-ended⁹², disguising wider expansionist schemes in the east. The example of Poland is indicative of such intentions. In Bülow's memorandum there is an explicit reference to the need to reject any solution which "applies to Danzig alone", favouring instead another "partition" of Poland. The same intransigent attitude dominated Neurath's briefing of the cabinet in April 1933, which restated Bülow's assertion that any agreement with Poland was "neither possible nor desirable"⁹³. As for the *Reichswehr*, the scenario of a war against Poland

⁸⁷ DGFP, C, 4, Enclosure 529 (Ribbentrop's report, 20 January 1936); C, 4, 71-2; Funke, M., "7 März 1936. Fallstudie zur aussenpolitischen Führungsstil Hitlers", in Michalka, W. (ed.), *Nazionalsozialistische Aussenpolitik* (Darmstadt 1978), pp. 277-324

⁸⁸ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 58-9; Funke, M., *Sanktionen und Kanonen. Hitler, Mussolini und der nationale Abessinienkonflikt 1935-1936* (Düsseldorf 1970), pp. 135ff

⁸⁹ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 357-64

⁹⁰ Taylor, *Origins*, pp. 67-8

⁹¹ Kettenacker, L., "The German View", in Douglas, R. (ed.), *1939. A Retrospect Forty Years After* (London 1983), pp. 26-8; Heinemann, pp. 90f; Brüning, H., *Memoiren 1918-1934*, vol. I (Munich 1972), p. 203; Craig, G. A., *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford 1978), pp. 678ff.

⁹² von Strandmann, H. P., "Imperialism and Revisionism in Interwar Germany", in Mommsen, W. J., Osterhammel, J. (eds.), *Imperialism and After. Continuities and Discontinuities* (London, Boston & Sydney 1986), pp. 90f

⁹³ DGFP, C, 1, 142 (Conference of Ministers, 7 April 1933); Heinemann, pp. 97-8

had been one of the favourite hypotheses of the military exercises organised by Blomberg since the late 1920s⁹⁴.

However, from the outset Hitler's eastern policy revealed an interesting divergence. In a speech delivered on 23 March, he appealed to Germany's neighbours for peaceful relations⁹⁵. This message was interpreted by the Polish leader, Pilsudski, as a departure from the traditional anti-Polish line of German diplomacy. For this reason, and at Polish request⁹⁶, negotiations for an agreement carefully by-passed the *Wilhelmstrasse*⁹⁷ and soon extended far beyond what Neurath regarded as an economically beneficial treaty⁹⁸ to the possibility of a political pact⁹⁹. In this direction, Hitler instructed the Nazi party in Danzig to avoid any provocation, paving the way for an extensive agreement between the Free City and the Polish government in August 1933¹⁰⁰. The ensuing negotiations in Berlin made significant progress in the last three months of 1933, leading to the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact in January 1934.

On its own, the pact with Poland appeared to thwart Germany's revisionist ambitions in the east but did not seriously alarm the *Wilhelmstrasse*¹⁰¹, as most diplomats interpreted Hitler's surprise mainly as the result of Germany's diplomatic isolation after withdrawing from Geneva in October¹⁰². However, the developments in German-Polish relations should be contrasted with the changing Nazi policy towards the Soviet Union. The importance of maintaining good relations with the USSR - first recognised by von Seeckt in the early 1920 and realised in the Treaty of

⁹⁴ Geyer, M., *Aufrüstung oder Sicherheit? Die Reichswehr und die Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936* (Wiesbaden 1980), pp. 188ff; Craig, G. A., *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford 1978), pp. 680-1

⁹⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 229-38 and, for a repetition of the same appeal in May 1933, pp. 270-9

⁹⁶ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 63ff. See also Roberts, H. L., "The Diplomacy of Colonel Beck", in Craig, G. A., Gilbert, F. (eds.), *The Diplomats, 1919-1939* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 579-614

⁹⁷ See, for example, DGFP, C, 1, 168 (Wysocki to Foreign Ministry, 20 April 1933)

⁹⁸ DBFP, 2nd, 6, 59. For Neurath's attitude to the Pact see, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

⁹⁹ DGFP, C, 2, 79/81/82

¹⁰⁰ For Hitler's instructions see DGFP, C, 1, 273. See also Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 65ff.

¹⁰¹ Seabury, P., *The Wilhelmstrasse. A study of German diplomats under the Nazi regime* (Berkeley 1954), pp. 38f

¹⁰² There is some truth to this, although it should be reminded that the negotiations had started in late spring. See, for example, Hitler's comments in Rauschnig, H., *The Revolution of Nihilism* (New York 1939), pp. 428ff

Rapallo in April 1922 and the Treaty of Berlin in 1926¹⁰³ -, was emphatically reiterated in Bülow's memorandum of April 1933. Although Neurath was not the most fervent advocate of Soviet friendship, he did play a crucial role in the ratification of the Berlin Treaty in April 1933¹⁰⁴. For his part, the new German Ambassador in Moscow, Nadolny, pressed his government in Berlin to consolidate friendly economic and political relations with the Soviet Union¹⁰⁵. However, by October 1933 Hitler considered an improvement in German-Russian relations as "impossible" and rejected Nadolny's numerous appeals for a rapprochement¹⁰⁶. After the pact with Poland in January 1934 Nadolny expressed his opposition to this policy and, when the Soviet proposal for a comprehensive political agreement submitted to the German government in May 1934 was not even considered by Hitler, he resigned in protest¹⁰⁷. At the same time, the *Führer* used Göring as a special envoy to Poland in order to explore Pilsudski's attitude to the prospect of a military alliance against the Soviet Union¹⁰⁸. He also appeared determined to preserve the atmosphere of rapprochement by dealing with problems in such sensitive areas, such as the Corridor and Upper Silesia, in an accommodating spirit¹⁰⁹.

In this sense, Hitler's commitment to revisionism in the 1933-36 period displayed a selectivity dominated by the prerequisites of a more far-reaching eastern policy. Although he seemed to share the traditional diplomats' view of revisionism as a short-term formula to disguise more extensive expansionist ambitions, he was also willing to sacrifice emotive revisionist claims (Corridor, Upper Silesia) and the colonial argument for the sake of an eastern policy dominated by a distinctly anti-Soviet orientation. The conclusion of the pact with Poland shows his flexibility with diplomatic opportunities, but his subsequent thoughts about a German-Polish alliance against the USSR highlights his ability to align short-term experiments with long-term plans for eastern expansion. Similarly, he relied on the traditional revisionist agenda of rearmament-conscription-Rhineland but was also eager to shelve the

¹⁰³ Geyer, *Aufrüstung*, pp. 78ff; Deist et al., "Causes and Preconditions", pp. 338f

¹⁰⁴ DGFP, C, 1, 136/140/147

¹⁰⁵ Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 417-8

¹⁰⁶ DGFP, C, 1, 457; C, 2, 118-9/122

¹⁰⁷ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 182-3; Craig, "German Foreign Office", pp. 417-8

¹⁰⁸ DGFP, C, 3, 474

Wilhelmstrasse's claims for border readjustments in Eupen-Malmedy and North Schleswig¹¹⁰. Therefore, the impression of continuity in German foreign policy was mitigated by these divergences which alluded to a more radical Hitlerite vision for long-term expansion.

III. Irredentism: the distortion of an argument

In its original form, irredentism had been a liberal argument, theoretically not linked to territorial expansionism but to certain populations, according to the principle of self-determination¹¹¹. The emergence of nationalism in the nineteenth century gave rise to the idea of nation-state, a territorial entity which should include the whole of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous population, and only that. In the first chapter we analysed the great difficulties in implementing this principle in the European mosaic of peoples up to 1914. The First World War revived the debate of national frontiers in the European system, and the Wilsonian Fourteen Points offered a new popularity to irredentist claims¹¹². The failure, however, of the Peace Treaties to balance the conflicting claims of the different states and the desire of the victors for a punitive arrangement against the vanquished aggravated an already problematic situation¹¹³. The dissolution of the three great multinational empires

¹⁰⁹ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 186-7

¹¹⁰ Heinemann, pp. 93f; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 282ff

¹¹¹ On the theoretical debate about the concept of irredentism, and the difficulties of a uniform definition, see Chazan, N., "Irredentism, Separatism and Nationalism", in Chazan (ed.), *Irredentism and International Politics* (London 1991), pp. 139-51. Cf. the theoretical framework of discussing irredentism in Horowitz, D. L., *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1985), pp. 229-88

¹¹² Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 13ff

¹¹³ See Dehio, L., *Germany and World Politics in the 20th Century* (London 1959), pp. 109-23 (116-23). See also Sharp, pp. 185ff

(Habsburg, Russian, Ottoman) in 1918 produced a plethora of new states with more or less inflated territorial aspirations. These were satisfied at the expense of the defeated powers. Given, though, the impossibility of drawing clear ethnic frontiers in central and eastern Europe, old *irredenta* were simply replaced - or complemented - by a long list of new ones. The further provision of plebiscites in some disputed areas proved how difficult it was to apply the principle of nationality in areas with limited tradition in etatist culture¹¹⁴.

Not surprisingly, the irredentist argument gained greater currency in interwar Germany than in Italy. To the traditional German *irredenta* in vast areas of the erstwhile Habsburg and Russian empires the Peace Treaties added the ethnically German populations of the territories ceded from the Reich to France, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the new Baltic states. At the same time, the collapse of the Habsburg empire stimulated hopes for the long-standing *alldeutsche* claim for a German-Austrian union, which the Treaty of Versailles eventually banned¹¹⁵. Finally, the extension of the northern Italian frontier up to the Brenner Pass placed a strong German-speaking minority in South Tyrol under the sovereignty of the Italian state.

What Germany lost in South Tyrol became the major gain of Italian irredentism from the postwar territorial settlement. The other gain was the modest extension of the north-eastern frontier in Istria and Dalmatia by the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920. In this sense, the problem with Italian postwar irredentism was totally different from the German case. Under the Peace Treaties Italy had succeeded in expanding her territory by capitalising on the international popularity of irredentism. Such was, however, the traditional strength and scope of Italian irredentism that it could not possibly have been satiated by any conceivable postwar settlement. It might have been easy to satisfy its anti-Austrian claim for Alto Adige and the Brenner, but it would be impossible to reward its anti-French (Corsica, Nice) or anti-British (Malta) ambitions, especially under a settlement that was mainly defined and

¹¹⁴ For the problem of minorities in interwar Europe, and the complications created after the plebiscites see Macartney, C. A., *National States and National Minorities* (Oxford 1934)

¹¹⁵ For the German-Austrian support for *Anschluss* in 1918-9, and the final prohibition, see Low, *The Anschluss Movement (1918-1919)*; Meyer, pp. 291-7; Temperley, vol. 4, pp. 465-9. For a contemporary presentation of the pro-union argument see Renner, K., *Deutschland, Österreich und die Völker des Ostens* (Berlin 1922)

guaranteed by Britain and France¹¹⁶. As in the case of colonialism, it was the feeling of limited compensation and injustice that offered a new lease of life to Italian irredentism in the interwar period.

In spite of this fundamental difference, however, there was a common element in the revival of the irredentist debate in postwar Italy and Germany. On the one hand irredentism was a major form of attack upon the principles of the Peace Treaties. It could exploit the issue of nationality in order to expose the inconsistent, selective application of the maxim of self-determination in redrawing the map of Europe after the First World War. In this way, irredentism could disguise significant territorial claims in the framework of a legal revisionism that appeared more justifiable, yet no less extensive than any conceivable Italian or German plan for continental expansion after the war. On the other hand, irredentism, whether in the context of revisionism or not, was the only available platform for the justification of territorial claims in the continent¹¹⁷. This was of particular importance for the future of fascist foreign policies in both Italy and Germany, since “unredeemed” territories formed a crucial part of the greater expansionist visions held by the two fascist leaderships. Mussolini needed Fiume as a strategic port in the Adriatic¹¹⁸, needed Malta and Corsica as control points for the centre of the Mediterranean¹¹⁹ in order to consolidate Italy’s geopolitical position in the area. In a similar way, the Polish Corridor stood in Hitler’s way towards the unification of the western and eastern German territories and the conquest of *Lebensraum* in Russia. In order to achieve that he also required the economic and defensive advantages of the neighbouring states in central Europe. In all these cases, irredentist arguments succeeded in covering the middle ground between traditional claims for *irredenta*, continental revisionism, and the large-scale expansionist ambitions of the two fascist regimes.

¹¹⁶ The scope of the Italian irredentist claims is discussed in “Irredentismo”, in Levi, F., Levra, U., Tranfaglia, N. (eds.), *Storia d’Italia* (Florence 1978), II, pp. 573-82. For the claims discussed at the Paris Peace Conference see Temperley, vol. 4, pp. 280f, 287f, 301ff

¹¹⁷ The “political” use of irredentism, namely as justification for expansionism, is discussed in Ben-Israel, H., “Irredentism: Nationalism Reexamined”, in Chazan (ed.), *Irredentism*, pp. 23-35 (31-35)

¹¹⁸ On the economic importance of Fiume for Italy see De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 105-7; Webster, pp. 106-7, 336

¹¹⁹ Knox, “Politica estera italiana”, p. 296; Tamaro, A., “L’Italia tradita nell’Adriatico”, *Politica*, 3/3 (1-1920), p. 339

There is ample evidence to support the thesis that the national-ideological character of postwar Italian and German irredentism was overshadowed by political considerations. Even during the postwar negotiations for the final peace settlement the Italian government exploited the irredentist argument only as part of the justification for its territorial claims against the erstwhile Habsburg empire¹²⁰. The same may be said about the cession of German territories to Poland and France under the Versailles Treaty. In both cases, territorial adjustments that were justified on irredentist terms produced a plethora of other *irredenta* that were not accounted for by the Peace Treaties¹²¹. Theoretically, even after the new territorial map of Europe had been ratified, the Italian Fascist regime could sustain irredentist claims over the south-eastern coast of France, over Kustenland and Dalmatia, over the islands of Malta and Corsica, and finally over certain Swiss cantons. Postwar Germany, on the other hand, could exploit irredentist issues in all possible directions: in Austria, in the *Sudetenland* area of Czechoslovakia, in Alsace-Lorraine, in the Polish Corridor, in Silesia, in Lithuania, in North Schleswig, and - after 1919 - also in South Tyrol.

The incorporation, however, of the irredentist principle into the wider geopolitical framework of fascist expansionism was marked by a highly selective and unprincipled application by the two regimes. Instead of being a normative concept referring to populations, fascist irredentism focused on *territories* and was exploited as part of the justification for wider expansionist plans. This, of course, was not a fascist novelty: a similar radical irredentist tendency had developed between 1890 and 1914 in the two countries. It was this pre-war tradition of radical irredentism that initiated the shift in the focus of irredentism from the ethnic character of populations to the geographical and historic dimensions of territorial claims. The fascist regimes, however, were innovative in that they came to value the significance of irredentist issues on an individual and flexible basis, according to their expansionist priorities and their wider political alliances or rivalries. This tendency resulted from the fact

¹²⁰ The acceptance of the strategic Italian argument for Brenner by Wilson facilitated the agreement for Italy's northern frontier, despite the creation of a vast German-speaking minority within the Italian state. See Sharp, p. 138; Albrecht-Carrié, *Diplomatic History*, pp. 80f; Temperley, IV (1921), pp. 280-7; De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 102-3. That the Brenner was defined as Italy's frontier in accordance with *security* and not *ethnic* principles is highlighted in Seymour, C., "Woodrow Wilson and self-determination in the Tyrol", *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 38 (1962), p. 574

¹²¹ Kaiser, "Coming of the War", pp. 184-5; Foster, p. 115; Walworth, pp. 468-84

that the irredentist argument lost its political autonomy in postwar Italy and Germany. Until the First World War it had more or less managed to retain its normative character within the nationalist discourse. It had also been treated as a semi-utopian concept which kept it away from the tests of political action. This situation changed completely in the interwar period. The gradual absorption of the nationalist movement into Fascism in both countries deprived the irredentism argument of those implications that were incompatible with the spirit of radical nationalism. Evidently, there was no room in Fascism for the “liberal” respect for other nationalities that had limited the territorial scope of irredentism in the past and kept it free from aggressive implications¹²². Thus, irredentism was transformed into an aggressive principle serving the irrelevant (i.e. territorial and not ethnic) ambitions of a large-scale territorial expansionism.

Furthermore, the Peace Treaties had greatly individualised and politicised the issue of “unredeemed” territories. Interwar irredentism was not simply about ethnically kin populations that had not as yet been incorporated in the national Italian or German territory. It also involved peoples and geographic areas that had been transferred to other states, old and new, through the legal force of the Peace Treaties. The political conflict between rival nationalisms had conceptualised the issue of *irredenta* in terms of international antagonism and had increased the number of potential territorial conflicts. Before the First World War, Italian irredentism was directed mainly against those territories still under the control of the Habsburg empire in particular, and to some extent those of France and Switzerland also. After 1919 the Yugoslav state was added to the list as the usurper of certain Habsburg territories with an alleged Italian character. Interwar German governments faced a similar, yet more extensive and complicated problem. German “unredeemed” areas, previously under Russian or Habsburg control, were divided among a plethora of new states in central and eastern Europe. Additionally, Germany lost even part of her pre-1914 territory to France, Belgium and Poland. Finally, the issue of Austria and

¹²² See Lowe, Marzari, Ch. 8; De Grand, *Nationalist Association*, pp. 88, 103-4

the fate of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol opened a new front in the south, against Italy this time¹²³.

Both Mussolini and Hitler were aware that they needed allies in order to pursue their great-power aspirations. In this sense, irredentism in its postwar form was unsuitable as an overall principle of foreign policy strategy. Its full implications would engage Italy and especially Germany in a quixotic battle against every single European state. This realisation prompted the selective political use of the irredentist arguments by the two fascist regimes. Mussolini focused on the Italo-Yugoslav conflict over Fiume, and the defence of Austria's independence as a safeguard against German influence in the Brenner. His main interest lay in upholding the European balance of power in the decade between Locarno and the Ethiopian campaign¹²⁴, and this induced him to tone down the anti-French and anti-British goals of Italian irredentism. Of course, he was a politician who resisted definite commitments, and the irredentist objectives in the Mediterranean were important for his plans for transforming the region into an Italian *mare nostrum*. Yet, control of the Adriatic and stability in the northern frontier were more immediate tasks. Therefore, although he never ceased to support irredentist activities in Malta and Corsica, he nevertheless abstained from a hard line on this issue until the late 1930s¹²⁵.

The success of Italian irredentism in Fiume in 1924 did not shift Mussolini's attention from the Adriatic region. This tendency was intensified in the following years as the restoration of the German power and the rise of Hitler to power appeared to threaten the balance of power in central Europe¹²⁶. As, however, the rapprochement between the two fascist regimes was growing (complemented with a German opt-out on the issue of South Tyrol), the focus of Italian irredentism started

¹²³ On Hitler's view on the importance of South Tyrol and the German-Italian relations see Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 571ff

¹²⁴ This distinction between the decade of "good behaviour" and the "aggressive" post-1935 foreign policy is meaningful when we speak of appearances, but does not reflect pacifist or pro-status quo intentions [on the distinction see Halperin, S. W., *Mussolini and Italian fascism* (Princeton, New Jersey 1964); Siebert, F., *Italiens Weg in der Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt 1962), pp. 14f; Wiskemann, E., *Fascism in Italy* (London & Basingstoke 1970), pp. 50ff]. Quite symbolically, Mussolini spoke of the "universality of fascism", and Italy's "right to revision" in the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Cassels, p. 395; Hughes, S., pp. 223ff. See also, in this study, Ch. 5, Section II

¹²⁵ The fascist involvement in irredentist movements in Corsica and Malta is documented in Cassels, pp. 86ff; Morewood, pp. 170-1

¹²⁶ See below, Ch. 5

to move again towards the Mediterranean. This was reflected in the popularity of the studies on various regions of the Adriatic-Mediterranean area that were published in Italy in the late 1930s¹²⁷. At the same time, as relations with France were steadily deteriorating, the neglected Italian claims on the south-east coast of France were resuscitated¹²⁸. Quite symbolically, Ciano's speech in front of the Chamber in April 1939 was dramatically interrupted by loud cries for "Corsica, Nice, Savoy"¹²⁹.

Hitler's irredentism, on the other hand, showed a similar selectivity, but a more stable pattern of political priorities. The *Führer's* unwavering emphasis on eastward expansion provided the German irredentist claims - traditional or revisionist - against Poland and the Baltic states with the highest political significance. Quite conveniently, the Polish Corridor and the "unredeemed" territories of East Prussia were also the top priorities of the *Reichswehr* leadership and the conservative diplomats¹³⁰. In an event organised by the War Minister von Blomberg only a few weeks after the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, Hitler spoke clearly to an audience of army officials about the need for rearmament in order to achieve the goals of eastward expansion¹³¹. Similarly, the Declaration of Principles of April 1933 echoed the traditional diplomats' endorsement of the revisionist-irredentist claims against Poland and Lithuania (Memel) as the central objectives of German foreign policy in the near future.

At the same time, the *alldutsche* ideological platform of the NSDAP, which had contributed to its electoral appeal up to 1933, brought the issues of Austria and the Sudetenland to the forefront of the political debate about Germany's role in central Europe. Before the war the irredentist claim for the incorporation of the German territories of the Habsburg empire into the Reich had been the sharp edge of the pan-German propaganda against the Bismarckian notion of a "satiated"

¹²⁷ For an account of the contemporary irredentist bibliography see Bianchini, "L'idea fascista", pp. 174ff; Casella, F. "L'immagine fascista dell'impero: Quale ruolo all'Adriatico", in Di Nolfo, Rainero, Vigezzi (eds.), *Politica di potenza*, pp. 187-203

¹²⁸ Morewood, pp. 181ff

¹²⁹ DGFP, D, 4, 412

¹³⁰ Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 149-50

¹³¹ For the text of the speech see Vogelsang, "Neue Dokumente", Document n. 7, pp. 434ff. See also Craig, *Germany*, pp. 571f. For a translation of some excerpts see Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 628-9

Germany¹³². In the postwar period the unifying web between the Austrian and the Sudetenland claims (i.e. the Habsburg empire) ceased to exist and the fates of the two territories/populations diverged. Austria became a homogeneous German-speaking independent state, while the lands of the Sudeten German minority were incorporated in the new Czechoslovak which was formally protected by France¹³³. Consequently, conservative German diplomacy and the *Reichswehr* leadership continued to view the Austrian issue as a more feasible and politically justifiable irredentist claim. By contrast, they temporarily relinquished the Sudetenland claim because of its secessionist implications threatening the integrity of Czechoslovakia. This different assessment was also reflected in the Nazi strategic planning for central Europe. Hitler had been prepared to raise the issue of Austria's union with the Reich as one of the top priorities of his foreign policy - and this was manifested in the premature Nazi Putsch in Vienna in July 1934¹³⁴. Towards Czechoslovakia, though, he had initially requested only a defensive plan with no immediate annexationist implications¹³⁵.

This situation changed radically in 1936-7. Austria and Czechoslovakia were linked in Hitler's foreign policy strategy as necessarily complementary steps towards the consolidation of a German sphere of influence in central Europe. The indispensability of this objective was further underlined by its defensive and economic significance for the Nazi plans for large-scale eastward expansion in the near future¹³⁶. As the Nazi regime was embarking on a course of rapid rearmament

¹³² On the concept of territorial "satiation", and its criticism by radical nationalist and fascist ideology, see, in this study, Chs. 1 and 2

¹³³ For the regulation of the two issues at Paris see Sharp, pp. 148-51. See also Perman, D. *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State* (Leiden 1962); Stadler, K. S., *The Birth of the Austrian Republic 1918-1932* (Leyden 1968)

¹³⁴ Pauley, B. F., *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis. A History of Austrian National Socialism* (London & Basingstoke 1981), pp. 122-37; Gholdner, F., *Dollfuss: Im Spiegel der US-Akten* (St. Pölten 1979), pp. 132-41

¹³⁵ Irving, D., *The War Path. Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939* (London 1978), p. 61. See also (p. 90) how the slogan "*Grossdeutschland*" was gradually dropped after 1937, as it implied an irredentist intention behind the German claim against Czechoslovakia. This reflected Hitler's lack of interest in the irredentist aspects of his plans against Czechoslovakia [Meyer, pp. 315-25] . For Hitler's political manipulation of the irredentist issue see Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 711ff; Ben-Israel, pp. 25ff

¹³⁶ For the defensive considerations see Müller, K.-J., *General Ludwig Beck. Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabchefs des deutschen Heers 1933-1938* (Boppard 1980), pp. 512ff. For the economic and defensive justifications see Wright, J., Stafford, P., "Hitler, Britain and the Hossbach Memorandum", *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 42 (1987), pp. 77-123

and on a high-risk foreign policy from 1936 onwards, the question of economic resources and security became of the utmost importance for the attainment of the Nazi long-term expansionist goals. These considerations formed the new unifying link between the Austrian and the Sudeten irredentist issues, in the latter case transforming the defensive planning into offensive¹³⁷.

Hitler's handling of the two issues in 1938-9 revealed the limitations of his irredentist beliefs. The ethnic argument might have been a sufficient political formula for the pursuit of the *Anschluss*, and the western powers - especially Britain - had long ago implied their *disinteressement* for a peaceful absorption of Austria by the German Reich¹³⁸. Mussolini's eventual consent to the union in March 1938 opened the way for a solution which at least kept up irredentist appearances¹³⁹. For their part, the National Socialist leaderships in Berlin and Vienna did their best to uphold an image of legality, by presenting the German intervention as emanating from the wishes of the Austrian, not the German side¹⁴⁰. The Sudeten crisis, however, in the summer and autumn of the same year was based on quite different issues. Hitler's strategy after 1937 aimed at the occupation of the whole Czechoslovak state, a goal for which the irredentist claim over the Sudetenland provided only a politically insufficient and geographically partial justification¹⁴¹. When in September 1938 Hitler raised his price in his negotiations with Chamberlain by demanding the Sudetenland *and* Bohemia, he exploited the card of Slovak, Polish and Hungarian irredentism¹⁴², but he also implied his determination to liquidate the Czechoslovak state by force. This was hardly an irredentist objective and it exposed the *Führer's*

¹³⁷ DGFP, D, 7, Appendix III, Doc. K; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Documents*, pp. 529-30

¹³⁸ For example, Lord Halifax had implied to Hitler that a *peaceful* revision of the Austrian issue would be acceptable to Britain (DGFP, D, 1, 145/147/151; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 122f)

¹³⁹ The change of the Italian policy on the *Anschluss* issue is documented in Lowe, Marzari, pp. 291-305; Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 103-4; Noakes, Pridham, *Documents*, pp. 535-6

¹⁴⁰ Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 106ff, and *Starting World War II*, pp. 297-8

¹⁴¹ Wheeler-Bennett, J. W., *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy* (London 1962); Murray, W., *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939. The Path to Ruin* (Princeton, New Jersey 1984), pp. 195-263; Taylor, T., *Munich: The Price of Peace* (London, Sydney, Auckland & Toronto 1979)

¹⁴² Kirkpatrick, I. S., *The Inner Circle* (London 1959), pp. 114ff; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 704-5. On Hitler's abortive attempt to implicate Hungary in his campaign against Czechoslovakia, by urging the Hungarians to raise irredentist claims see Irving, p. 125; DGFP, D, 4, 202. For Slovakia see Hönsch, J. K., *Die Slowakei und Hitlers Ostpolitik* (Cologne 1965); Kaiser, "Coming of the War", p. 187. For the Directive "Green" see DGFP, D, 2, encl. to Doc. 175; and Doc. 554

political manipulation of the ethnic argument in order to promote purely expansionist plans. The problem was that the British government took the irredentist alibi of Nazi expansionism quite seriously, eager to make concessions on these lines, without realising that no territorial offer on *ethnic* grounds would ever satisfy the *geographical* prerequisites of the fascist "new order"¹⁴³. The final, if ephemeral, solution, namely the cession of the Sudetenland to the Reich, was authorised on the grounds of the overwhelmingly German character of the population and the region¹⁴⁴. This irredentist justification offered a new lease of legitimacy to Nazi expansionism, provided Germany with valuable time for military preparation, and removed a significant obstacle to eastward expansion¹⁴⁵.

The insincerity of the *alldutsche* pretensions of Hitler's foreign policy, however, were even more clearly manifested in the dropping of the German irredentist claims in Alsace and South Tyrol. The two German-speaking minorities living in these regions had been traditionally seen as integral parts of the dream of a pan-German state at the heart of Europe. It was with regard to these two minorities - and their home territories - that the alleged irredentist principle of Nazi foreign policy was totally overshadowed by the crude geopolitical considerations of Hitler's large-scale expansionist plans. In the first case, the region of Alsace was geographically irrelevant to the Nazi vision of *Lebensraum* expansion in the east. This greatly explains Hitler's cool attitude towards the fate of this minority, at least compared with his active interest in the German populations in central and eastern Europe. Undoubtedly, the Alsatians had developed a fairly idiosyncratic cultural identity, quite distinct from either the French or the German, and had also resisted legislation aiming at political, cultural or religious assimilation by either of the two

¹⁴³ Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, p. 117; Trevor-Roper, H. R. (ed.), *The Testament of Adolf Hitler. The Hitler-Bormann Documents, February-April 1945* (London 1961), p. 58

¹⁴⁴ The text of the Treaty (DGFP, D, 2, 675) repeatedly emphasises the "German" character of the ceded territories. For the irredentist justification behind Chamberlain's appeasement efforts in September 1938 see Douglas, R., "Chamberlain and Appeasement", in Mommsen, Kettenacker (eds.), *Fascist Challenge*, pp. 83ff

¹⁴⁵ In February 1939 Hitler made a retrospective assessment of his foreign policy successes. He insisted on the strategic indispensability of the union with Austria and the cession of the Sudetenland. See Michalka, *Das Dritte Reich* (Munich 1985), vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik*, pp. 224-5. An excerpt is translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 725

sides¹⁴⁶. However, the symbolic significance of the region, if not only in irredentist at least in revisionist and historic terms, would have justified a more energetic political exploitation of this issue by the Nazi regime - something that was far from the case.

The second ethnic issue, namely of the minority in South Tyrol, is more enlightening about the political manipulation of the irredentist argument by Hitler. Directly linked to the status of Austria, this question acquired a symbolic importance for the revisionist and *alldeutsche* aspirations of German nationalism after the war¹⁴⁷. It was, however, its interrelation with the *Anschluss* issue that implicated the fate of the South Tyrolean German-speaking minority in another sensitive aspect of European stability - Italo-German relations¹⁴⁸. The political and defensive importance of the Brenner for Italy transformed this problem into a bone of contention in her relations with the Nazi regime. This put Hitler in a complex political dilemma: to adhere to the priority of the pan-German argument at the expense of Italian friendship or to sacrifice a vital irredentist claim in order to achieve an Italo-German alliance¹⁴⁹? It was a difficult political question, but Hitler's decision to pursue the second option had been an unwavering guideline of his foreign policy strategy since the early 1920s. Consequently, German irredentism in the Brenner was dropped in favour of a strategic consideration (alliance with Italy) which was far more important for the Nazi wider expansionist plans in the long term. What is more striking, however, is that the irredentist issues of Austria and South Tyrol were politically separated and treated on a completely different political basis, despite the fact that they were interrelated and referred to the very same principle.

¹⁴⁶ Gutmann, E., "Concealed or Conjured Irredentism: The Case of Alsace", in Chazan (ed.), *Irredentism*, pp. 44ff. See also Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 901 (speech to the Nuremberg Party Rally, 12 September 1938), and II, pp. 1149, 1178 (response to President Roosevelt, 28 April 1939)

¹⁴⁷ On the irredentist dimensions of the South Tyrol issue see For the issue of South Tyrol, see Toscano, M., *Alto Adige - South Tyrol. Italy's Frontier with the German World* (Baltimore 1975), pp. 1-15; Alcock, A. E., *The History of the South Tyrol Question* (Geneva 1970), pp. 19-45; De Felice, R., *Il problema dell'Alto Adige nei rapporti italo-tedeschi dall'Anschluss alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), Ch. 1

¹⁴⁸ The complications in the German-Italian relations in the 1920s due to the question of South Tyrol are discussed in Cassels, pp. 272-87; Schubert, G., *Anfänge Nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik* (Cologne 1961), pp. 76ff; De Felice, *I rapporti tra fascismo e nazionalsocialismo fino all'andata al potere di Hitler 1922-1933. Appunti e documenti* (Naples 1971), pp. 206f. For the importance of the German-Italian relations for the radicalisation of fascism in the late 1930s see below, Ch. 5

¹⁴⁹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 571-5

This inconsistency in the application of the irredentist principle by both the Italian and the German fascist regimes leads us to three main conclusions. First, the irredentist argument under fascism was reduced to a propagandistic function in the much wider context of fascist expansionism. For the purposes of such an aggressive territorial policy, irredentism was deprived of its remaining “liberal” elements that had survived from the initial concept after the bitter struggle of the First World War and the acrimonious peace negotiations. In this sense, it was transformed into an expansionist justification with aggressive connotations of political or even racial character. Second, the irredentist argument gradually lost its normative value. It was subjected to an opportunistic function that assessed the desirability of individual claims over populations according to the political significance of the involved territory for the wider plans of fascist expansion. Third, as the scope of the Italian and German great-power ambitions gradually increased in the 1930s, the ethnic element of the irredentist justification became a limitation to fascist expansionist aspirations. As large-scale expansion became the top priority of the two fascist regimes in the late 1930s, irredentism could no longer sustain its primary emphasis on disputed and territorially limited claims based on the ethnic identity of populations. When the territorial potential of both revisionism and ethnic irredentism had been almost exhausted, the need to justify wider expansion introduced the argument of *space* as the main idea underpinning further expansionist objectives.

IV. From border to space policy: towards large-scale fascist expansion

The adherence of the two fascist regimes to traditional arguments of territorial expansion, such as anti-Versailles revisionism and irredentism, upheld an impression of continuity between pre-fascist and fascist foreign policy objectives. Until 1935-6, both Mussolini and Hitler exploited the legitimacy of such traditional claims to achieve territorial changes of limited scale, in the form of border readjustments. However, as we saw, the fascist commitment to border policy was

mitigated by a selective endorsement of certain goals and a tepid attitude towards others, as well as by specific moves (the Corfu incident, the 1934 German-Polish pact) which were either against or beyond the logic of revisionism. From the fascist point of view, adherence to border policy was an interim step towards the unfolding of a larger-scale *space* policy, dominated by emphasis on constant activism and expressing the right of the two peoples to expand in their *historic* spheres of influence. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had rejected the “absurdity of the 1914 frontiers”, advocating the need to avoid a myopic border-policy in favour of a “soil policy of the future”¹⁵⁰. This argument was reactivated with renewed vigour at the Hossbach conference, where the *Führer* stated that “the aim of German policy is to preserve the national community and to enlarge it. It is therefore a question of space”¹⁵¹. For his part, Mussolini’s early vague references to the Mediterranean as a *mare nostrum* took a more concrete form after 1935: in his Milan speech of 1936, he alluded to Italy’s wide expansionist intentions in order to escape from geopolitical imprisonment in the Mediterranean¹⁵², while in February 1939 he spoke of the need to “march to the Oceans” in terms of a “historic necessity”¹⁵³.

In this sense, the radicalisation of the expansionist policies of the two fascist regimes from the mid-1930s onwards reflected a change of focus and pace towards space policy as an open-ended *leitmotif* for large-scale expansion. This change had been facilitated by a number of factors and developments. The strengthening of the authoritarian tendencies of the two systems removed institutional and political restrictions on the two leaders’ freedom to shape and implement foreign policy decisions¹⁵⁴. At the same time, the emergence of a powerful Germany generated a new dynamism in international affairs, while the gradual consolidation of the Axis alliance subverted the post-Locarno balance of power in the continent, creating new

¹⁵⁰ Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf*, pp. 597-8

¹⁵¹ DGFP, D, 1, 19 (Hossbach Conference report); and, for a translation, Noakes, Pridham, *Nazism*, III, p. 681

¹⁵² Quartararo, 307f

¹⁵³ Quoted in Deakin, F. W., *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (New York & London 1962), pp. 5-6. See also, Quartararo, pp. 424f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 315-6

¹⁵⁴ On this issue see, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

opportunities for realignments and readjustments in the European system¹⁵⁵. However, what is of particular importance to this chapter is that each of the two regimes made specific strategic choices and followed different tactics in implementing their space policies. These raise complex questions about the pre-determined or not character of these decisions, and about continuities or discontinuities in Italian and German foreign policy. In the following part we will examine the colonial and continental expansionist ventures of the two regimes, assessing their relevance to the wider expansionist visions of the two leaders and their function in the overall framework of the Italian and German foreign policies.

Colonialism

As we have seen, colonialism had been the most symbolic form of prestige expansionism for Italy and Germany since the 1870s. The determination of the European powers to stabilise the territorial pattern in the continent and divert their antagonisms to the colonial field grew considerably. This furthered the importance of colonial expansion as alternative expression of the great-power aspirations of the European nations. The First World War re-focused attention on the long-standing claims for continental expansion, especially for “latecomers” such as Italy and Germany. This was, however, a temporary shift, largely due to the irregular situation created by the European war. With the conclusion of the Peace Treaties the new territorial map of Europe was again presented as unalterable, and the colonies resumed their political function as the field of territorial compensation for the discontented and as the legitimate prize for international antagonism¹⁵⁶.

Mussolini had both the political freedom and the ideological propensity to integrate colonial claims in the framework of his large-scale expansionist vision. His aspiration to make Italy the superpower of the Mediterranean required control of a

¹⁵⁵ A detailed discussion of the importance of the Axis alliance in radicalising the expansionist policies of the two regimes is provided in Ch. 5

¹⁵⁶ Segrè, “Il colonialismo”, p. 132; Rumi, G., “‘Revisionismo’ fascista ed espansione coloniale (1925-1935)”, in Aquarone, Vernassa (eds.), pp. 448-9, 460, 463; DDI, 7th, III, 829; IV, 320

vast area from Gibraltar to the Red Sea¹⁵⁷. This involved a strong position not only in the European coast, but also on the African side¹⁵⁸. In this sense, the prestige factor of Fascist colonialism could also serve the ideological and geopolitical ambitions of the Fascist regime in the Mediterranean. Two further developments encouraged Mussolini's focus on colonial policies at the expense of continental expansion. The stabilisation of the European system between the Locarno Pact (1925) and the advent of Hitler to power (1933) rendered any desire to alter the territorial arrangements in the continent inopportune, if not totally inconceivable during the above period. Thus, the greatest part of the Italian efforts for prestige were channelled into the colonial field, in which the western powers were more willing to make promises or even concessions in return for Italy's support for the European status quo¹⁵⁹. Furthermore, the emergence of Nazi Germany made Mussolini himself more sensitive to the importance of the European balance of power. Thus, in order to preserve his "determinant" position in the continent and increase his fascist prestige towards Germany, the *Duce* exploited the colonial card, taking advantage of what he had perceived, from 1932 onwards, as favourable British and French attitudes towards a colonial campaign against Ethiopia¹⁶⁰.

In territorial terms, Mussolini's colonial policy was undoubtedly the most successful part of his expansionist activities. In 1922 he inherited from his liberal predecessors a meagre colonial "empire" in north (Libya) and east (Somalia, Eritrea) Africa, where Italian control had almost collapsed due to the pressure of indigenous rebels¹⁶¹. In spite of his failure to elicit a colonial mandate in 1923¹⁶², Mussolini

¹⁵⁷ On Mussolini's references to the need to control Suez, Malta, Corsica and Gibraltar, see Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 296, 298-9. See also De Magistris' essay on "Mediterraneo" in the *Dizionario di Politica* (Rome 1940)

¹⁵⁸ This distinction corresponds to Segrè's analysis of the "two poles" of fascist foreign policy: one in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean coast, and the other in North and East Africa. See Segrè, "Il colonialismo", pp. 140-1

¹⁵⁹ Segrè, "Il colonialismo", p. 132

¹⁶⁰ The origins of the French policy of *disinteressement politique* are to be found in 1931. See Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 312-3; De Felice, "Alcune osservazioni", pp. 65ff. On the diplomatic background of the developments that led to the Ethiopian campaign see Robertson, E. M., *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER. Europe and Africa 1932-36* (London & Basingstoke 1977), esp. Ch. 10 for the Stresa Conference

¹⁶¹ On the collapse of Italian control in Libya after the First World War, see Segrè, *The Fourth Shore. The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago & London 1974), pp. 47f. For Somalia see Rochat, G., *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin 1973), p. 136; Del Boca, *Italiani in Africa orientale*, pp. 861-72

showed an unwavering determination to restore Italy's colonial reputation, pursue traditional colonial aspirations and instil some sort of colonial enthusiasm among the population¹⁶³. First of all, he achieved the cession of Jubaland and Jarabub by the British, two territorial additions to Italy's existing colonies in east and north Africa respectively. Second, he initiated comprehensive campaigns in Libya and Somalia in order to restore Italian control over the rebellious regions¹⁶⁴. Emphasis on restoring Italian control over Libya and Somalia dated back to the beginning of the 1922, when the liberal Minister of Colonies, G. Amendola, spoke of the need to resurrect Italy's *Impero*¹⁶⁵. A few months after he had been appointed Prime Minister, in early 1923, Mussolini adopted an intransigent attitude towards the indigenous populations in Somalia and in Cyrenaica. In the former case, the Italian governor, Cesare Maria de Vecchi, eliminated any trace of resistance from local tribes and established total control in the region by 1928¹⁶⁶. In Libya, the previous policy of compromise with the Sanussis was repudiated by the Italian government in 1923, followed by a long drawn-out military conflict. Lack of tangible progress by 1930, however, prompted Mussolini to grant control of the operations to Graziani who, in co-operation with Marshal Badoglio, instigated a ruthless policy of eliminating the Sanussis. Through a combination of extensive warfare and genocidal methods, Graziani was able to announce the "pacification" of Libya by 1932¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶² On the developments associated with the Italian claim for a mandate see Cassels, pp. 24-45. For the discussions at the Lausanne Conference see Di Nolfo, *Politica estera*, pp. 56ff; DDI, 7th, I, 141/189/221

¹⁶³ De Felice, R., *Mussolini*, Part 2: *Il fascista*, vol. I: *La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin 1966), p. 375; II: *L'organizzazione dello Stato Fascista, 1925-1929* (Turin 1968), pp. 652ff

¹⁶⁴ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 96-105, 136. Especially for the case of Libya see Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford 1949); Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 41, 46-8; and *ibid.*, pp. 57-157 for the efforts for reconstruction and exploitation after the completion of conquest.

¹⁶⁵ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 98f; Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960* (London 1996), pp. 104-5

¹⁶⁶ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 136-7

¹⁶⁷ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 103-5

The Ethiopian campaign

However, the most impressive part of Mussolini's colonial policy was the successful execution of the Ethiopian campaign in 1935-6¹⁶⁸. This has undoubtedly been the most hotly debated foreign policy initiative of the Italian Fascist regime in the 1930s, raising all sorts of questions about continuities in Italian foreign policy and about Mussolini's long-term expansionist intentions. R. De Felice has described the Ethiopian campaign as "Mussolini's masterpiece"¹⁶⁹, in the sense that the *Duce* pursued it with obsessive determination and increased the regime's prestige both domestically and on the international level. Such a view directly challenged the Salvemini orthodoxy of viewing the campaign as the "prelude to the Second World War", and was disputed by C. Segrè and R. J. B. Bosworth, who underlined the long-term destabilising effects of the campaign for the whole European system¹⁷⁰. Both authors compared the invasion of Ethiopia with the ill-conceived Libyan campaign of 1912¹⁷¹, but they also detected a lack of foresight in Mussolini's strategy which contrasted with Giolitti's more realistic expansionist policy. Others, like L. Pastorelli, analysed the Ethiopian campaign as the beginning of a new, more aggressive phase in the expansionist policies of the Fascist regime, breaking a line of continuity which had been upheld by the allegedly moderate foreign policy of the previous decade¹⁷². By contrast, an influential interpretation of Mussolini's decision to attack Ethiopia in 1935 pointed to the direction of its utility for domestic purposes. F. Catalano viewed the venture as a diversionary move, aimed to distract attention

¹⁶⁸ There is ample bibliography on the Ethiopian campaign, both in English and Italian. See, for example, Rochat G., *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia. Studio e documenti, 1932-1936* (Milan 1971); Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 136-45; Badoglio, P., *La guerra d'Etiopia* (Milan 1936); Graziani, R., *Il fronte sud* (Milan 1938); Robertson, *Empire-BUILDER*, Chs. 14-15. See also below, Ch. 5, Section IIb

¹⁶⁹ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. 1: *Gli anni del consenso, 1919-1936* (Turin 1968), pp. 758ff. Cf. the discussion of this view in Knox, M., "The fascist regime, its foreign policy and its wars: an 'anti-anti-fascist' orthodoxy?", in Finney, P. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London & New York 1997), pp. 151-2

¹⁷⁰ Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 48ff; Segrè, C. G., "Il colonialismo e la politica estera: variazioni liberali e fasciste", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S. (eds.), *La politica estera italiana, 1860-1985* (Bologna 1991), pp. 121-46

¹⁷¹ Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 49-51, 107ff; Segrè, "Colonialismo", pp. 135ff

¹⁷² Pastorelli, L., "La storiografia italiana del dopoguerra sulla politica estera", *Storia e Politica*, 10 (1971), pp. 603f

from the mounting economic crisis which hit Italy later than many other countries¹⁷³. This social imperialistic argument was shared by G. Rochat and G. Baer, who underlined Mussolini's conscious exploitation of foreign policy for primarily domestic purposes, as a means to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime after a period of stagnation and waning public enthusiasm for Fascism¹⁷⁴. An intriguing middle way is reflected in M. Knox's thesis that the Ethiopian campaign combined a long-term ideological goal of the *Duce's* expansionist vision with his ambition to use an impressive foreign policy success to promote a revolutionary transformation of the domestic system in a more totalitarian direction¹⁷⁵.

In terms of continuity with the liberal foreign policy, there was nothing particularly novel in choosing Ethiopia as a goal for territorial expansion¹⁷⁶. Italian interests in east Africa had been consolidated since the 1880s, when successful expansion in Eritrea and Somalia laid the foundations of an Italian colonial *Impero* in the last available region of Africa¹⁷⁷. Crispi's ill-fated campaign against Ethiopia in the 1890s seemed the obvious policy in order to establish a large colonial network around the southern exit of the Suez Canal. The humiliating defeat of 1896 at Adowa caused a deep national trauma but did not thwart the Italian expansionist ambitions in the region. In 1906 a tripartite agreement between Italy, Britain and France comprised a secret acknowledgement of an Italian sphere of influence in Ethiopia¹⁷⁸. Strategic plans for an attack on Ethiopia from Eritrea dated back to 1908¹⁷⁹. Even under Fascist rule, the diplomatic establishment of the Palazzo Chigi nurtured concrete hopes of an expansionist move in Ethiopia. The Italian-British agreement of December 1925 reaffirmed the informal division of the country into spheres of

¹⁷³ Catalano, F., *L'economia italiana di guerra. La politica economico-finanziaria del fascismo dalla guerra d'Etiopia alla caduta del regime, 1935-1943* (Milan 1969), pp. 7ff. Cf., Lyttelton, A., "Italian Fascism", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), pp. 107-8

¹⁷⁴ Rochat, G., "Il ruolo delle forze armate nel regime fascista: conclusioni provvisorie e ipotesi di lavoro", *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1972), pp. 188-99; Baer, G. W., *The Coming of the Italo-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge Mass 1967)

¹⁷⁵ Knox, M., "Conquest", pp. 43-9; and "Il fascismo", pp. 329-30

¹⁷⁶ Rochat, G., *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin 1973), pp. 219-24

¹⁷⁷ Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 98-9, 106

¹⁷⁸ Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 329ff; Candeloro G., *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 9: *Il fascismo e le sue guerre* (Milan 1998, 8th ed.), pp. 369-70

¹⁷⁹ *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia* (Milan 1971), pp. 21f

influence, implying a British recognition of Italy's continuing interest in the region¹⁸⁰. In the ensuing period until 1932 the Italian government followed a policy of "friendship", culminating in the 1928 agreement with Menelik, while at the same time encouraging the consolidation of Italian economic interests in Ethiopia¹⁸¹. However, by 1932 this policy was officially described as a failure by the Palazzo Chigi. In one of his last initiatives as Foreign Minister, Grandi gave priority to the *politica periferica* in early 1932, requesting a detailed examination of the prospects of an aggressive war in east Africa¹⁸². In an extensive memorandum published in August 1932, R. Guariglia expressed the need to strengthen Italy's military presence in Ethiopia on the basis of British and French consensus¹⁸³. A year before, the same diplomat had also spoken of Italy's expansionist ambitions at the expense of Ethiopia, alluding to a future course of expansion, "probably with war"¹⁸⁴.

However, this continuity between liberal and Fascist foreign policy strategies towards Ethiopia should not overshadow Mussolini's consistent personal interest in the prospect of a war in east Africa. This interest dates back to 1925, at the time of the agreement with Britain over Ethiopia, when the *Duce* spoke of his desire to pursue an "integral violent solution" when more auspicious international circumstances prevailed¹⁸⁵. Such an idea took a more concrete shape by 1932, when Mussolini asked the Ministry of Colonies to draft an operational plan for an offensive action against Ethiopia¹⁸⁶. The memorandum presented by De Bono envisaged a large-scale invasion in the near future, but at the same time reiterated the same strategic precondition with Guariglia's report: the consent of Britain and France¹⁸⁷. At the same time, Mussolini asked his supreme commander of the army, Badoglio, to examine the prospects for an offensive action in east Africa. Badoglio's subsequent vehement criticism of De Bono's plan had much to do with his personal antipathy

¹⁸⁰ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 242-5

¹⁸¹ On the 1928 accords see Vedovato, G., *Gli accordi Italo-Etiopici dell'agosto 1928* (Florence 1956), pp. 101-5; Candeloro, pp. 336f

¹⁸² These initiatives are discussed in Knox, "Il Fascismo", pp. 320-1

¹⁸³ Guariglia, pp. 763-73; Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 276-93; Candeloro, pp. 337f

¹⁸⁴ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. I: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1974), pp. 399f

¹⁸⁵ See Mussolini's comments in OO, XXIX, 465; Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 26ff

¹⁸⁶ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 137f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 246ff

¹⁸⁷ For the memorandum see Del Boca, A., *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (Rome & Bari 1976), pp. 177f; Candeloro, pp. 337-8; Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 276f

towards the Minister of Colonies and his anger with Mussolini's decision to appoint De Bono as commander in the event of a war in Ethiopia¹⁸⁸. However, Badoglio's hostility to the plan also reflected a fear that the assumption of British and French consensus to the invasion of Ethiopia was dangerously misplaced¹⁸⁹.

It is in this light that we should examine Mussolini's eventual decision to authorise the campaign against Ethiopia in late 1934. The directive of 30 December 1934 unequivocally stated as its goal the "whole destruction of the Ethiopian armed forces and the occupation of the whole of Ethiopia"¹⁹⁰. Security in Europe, however, had been relegated to a secondary condition under the impression of French acquiescence. This optimism dated back to 1931, when, in a conversation between Grandi and Laval, the latter had used the example of Ethiopia as a possible compensation for an Italian compromise on the issue of Tunisia¹⁹¹. A few days after the directive, the Mussolini-Laval agreement consolidated the former's impression that Italy had been granted a "free hand" in Ethiopia¹⁹². The diplomatic omens became even more favourable in the spring of 1935 with the formation of the Stresa front. The final text of the agreement made a specific reference to the need to uphold stability "in Europe" - a reference which was added by the British delegation but was interpreted by the Italian leadership as a further indication of tacit consensus for expansion in Africa¹⁹³. At the same time, a separate Italian-French military agreement to oppose any German plans in Austria strengthened the impression that German aggression in the Danube region would be effectively contained by the Stresa front¹⁹⁴. The ambiguity, however, of the British position prompted the Italian diplomats to press for a more definite clarification of the British attitude to Italy's claims in east Africa. Eden's visit to Rome in June 1935 was accompanied by a proposal for a diplomatic compromise, under which Italy would be granted a corridor via Zeila to

¹⁸⁸ On this issue see in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

¹⁸⁹ Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 225ff, 324-7; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 248-50; Candeloro, pp. 381ff

¹⁹⁰ Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 376-9; *Colonialismo*, pp. 138f; Knox, "Il fascismo", pp. 322f

¹⁹¹ DDI, 7th, X, 413

¹⁹² De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 526ff; Candeloro, pp. 332-3; Quartararo, pp. 97f

¹⁹³ For the text of the agreement see DBFP, 2nd, 12, 722. See also Baer, pp. 159ff; Kirkpatrick, S. I., *Mussolini. Study of a Demagogue* (London 1964), pp. 275ff; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 262ff

¹⁹⁴ Quartararo, pp. 100f

Somaliland, but the plan was explicitly rejected by both Mussolini and Guariglia¹⁹⁵. In July 1935, another initiative to refer the issue to international arbitration under the aegis of the League of Nations was dismissed by the *Duce* as “humiliating for Italy”¹⁹⁶, while a similar attempt in August-September to place Ethiopia under an international mandate and to recognise a formal Italian interest was rejected by the Fascist Grand Council¹⁹⁷. Instead, plans for a large-scale mobilisation of the Italian armed forces went forward during the summer of 1935, with over 300,000 soldiers transferred to Eritrea and Somaliland accompanied by planes and heavy artillery¹⁹⁸.

Mussolini’s determination to pursue a violent occupation of the whole of Ethiopia, in spite of alarming indications that Britain would oppose such an action and France was opposed to an aggressive campaign, is further illustrated by his rejection of the objections raised by both the King and Marshal Badoglio. Their fears stemmed from the traditional belief of the conservative establishment in the indispensability of British friendship and reflected their conviction that such a friendship would be seriously jeopardised by an attack on Ethiopia¹⁹⁹. It is true that Mussolini and his diplomatic advisers, including Ciano, chose to underestimate the indications of British hostility to the campaign²⁰⁰. Until June 1935 he kept the channels of communication with London open in the hope that the issue would not be brought to the League of Nations and that Britain would not risk the cohesion of the Stresa front by adopting an intransigent line towards Italy. However, the referral of the dispute to the League in July and the British-German Naval Agreement a month earlier caused considerable irritation and alarm to the Italian Fascist leadership²⁰¹. From that point onwards, British acquiescence ceased to be a prerequisite for Italian action in Ethiopia. The self-confidence of the regime was further strengthened by intercepted information by the *Servizio Informazione Militari* (Intelligence Service,

¹⁹⁵ For Eden’s proposal, see Eden, A., *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden, KG, PC, MC*, vol. 2: *Facing the Dictators* (London 1962), pp. 221f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 272ff. For Guariglia’s negative attitude see Guariglia, pp. 245-6; Quartararo, p. 134

¹⁹⁶ Candeloro, p. 377

¹⁹⁷ OO, XXVII, pp. 728ff

¹⁹⁸ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 138-40

¹⁹⁹ Candeloro, pp. 383f; Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven & London 1989), pp. 270-1

²⁰⁰ Bottai, *Diario*, 19.11 and 24.11.1935

²⁰¹ Candeloro, pp. 374f; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 270ff, esp. Mussolini’s reply to Drummond in which he accused Britain of destroying “collective decisions” (quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 275-6)

SIM) about the low level of mobilisation and fighting potential of the British fleet in the Mediterranean²⁰². Therefore, Mussolini pushed forward his aggressive plans in the belief that Britain would refrain from counter-measures in the Mediterranean and in Africa, but also in the knowledge of British opposition to the campaign²⁰³.

In this sense, the decision to launch the invasion in October 1935 combined a long-term significance with a short-term assessment of the international situation. Throughout the 1920s, Mussolini displayed a determination to reconstitute and expand Italy's colonial empire in Africa. After restoring control in Libya and Somaliland, he turned his attention to east Africa and the Arabian peninsula with a two-edged policy of penetration in Ethiopia and Yemen²⁰⁴. By the end of 1934, while plans in Yemen foundered, the impression of French and British acquiescence in an Italian expansion in Ethiopia convinced Mussolini that the situation was opportune, an impression which was further strengthened by the Stresa front and Germany's diplomatic isolation. This favourable short-term realignment of international relations, according to J. Petersen, constituted the catalyst for prioritising the invasion plan in the first half of 1935²⁰⁵.

When this window of opportunity dramatically narrowed in August with the failure of the Tripartite conference in Paris²⁰⁶, and in September with the British mobilisation in the Mediterranean²⁰⁷, Mussolini appeared determined to pursue his geopolitical ambitions in Ethiopia *in spite of* the adverse international circumstances. He gave explicit instructions to the Italian delegation in the League of Nations to refuse to negotiate any concessions²⁰⁸, and when Guariglia advised him to accept a compromising solution to refer the issue to an international committee²⁰⁹, he dismissed the suggestion without further discussion. However, Mussolini had not as

²⁰² Robertson, E. M., pp. 155-83

²⁰³ Baer, pp. 248ff

²⁰⁴ For Italy's policy towards Yemen see the detailed analysis of Quartararo, R., "L'Italia e lo Yemen. Uno studio sulla politica di espansione italiana nel Mar Rosso", *Storia Contemporanea*, 190 (1979), pp. 811-867

²⁰⁵ Petersen, J., "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 45-55

²⁰⁶ Aloisi, P. *Journal 25 Juin-14 Juillet 1936* (Paris 1957), 17.8.1935

²⁰⁷ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 280-1

²⁰⁸ Aloisi, 9-10.8.1936

yet finalised his strategy, aware of the French intentions to broker a wider agreement and of the British reluctance either to support the imposition of economic sanctions or to block the Suez Canal²¹⁰. The eventual decision of the League of Nations to apply sanctions did cause some alarm to the Italian government and led to a somewhat more accommodating attitude towards the French proposals of ceding extensive Ethiopian territories to Italy while reducing the remaining regions to the status of a virtual Italian protectorate²¹¹. This willingness to discuss a negotiated settlement regarding Ethiopia seems to endorse R. Quartararo's assertion that Mussolini had not irreversibly decided on the *whole* conquest of Ethiopia and remained interested in a certain diplomatic solution that would enable Italy to consolidate her position in east Africa²¹². However, throughout the autumn of 1935, Mussolini became increasingly disillusioned with the British procrastination. By the time of the Hoare-Laval compromise plan in December 1935 he had reverted to an intransigent position: after having initially dismissed the offer, he was convinced by Aloisi to consider it but only as a basis for future discussion and with a series of counter-proposals for revisions²¹³. Given the negative assessment of the plan by Suvich²¹⁴, Mussolini's procrastination tactics until 18 December should hardly be interpreted as a sign of interest in a compromise agreement with the British and the French²¹⁵. Instead, Grandi's reports from 16 December about the massive opposition to the Hoare-Laval plan amongst the British parliament and public opinion²¹⁶ should have convinced Mussolini that the compromise offer was about to be dropped in London before any serious discussion. Indeed, on 19 December, Hoare resigned and Vansittart informed Grandi that no other initiative outside the framework of the League of Nations should have been expected from the British side²¹⁷.

²⁰⁹ Guariglia, pp. 265ff

²¹⁰ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 278ff

²¹¹ For the plan see DDI, 8th, II, 354/360; and, for the Italian reply, II, 366

²¹² Quartararo, Ch. 2: De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. 1: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1968), pp. 389-411

²¹³ DDI, 8th, II, 860

²¹⁴ DDI, 8th, II, 856

²¹⁵ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 288-9

²¹⁶ DDI, 8th, II, 865

²¹⁷ DDI, 8th, II, 870

The ensuing period until Badoglio's entry into Addis Abeba in May 1936 was marked by the advance of the Italian armed forces in Ethiopia and growing popular support for the campaign at home. Especially after the imposition of sanctions in November 1935, the popularity of the Fascist regime reached unprecedented heights²¹⁸. Even the initially sceptical King endorsed his Prime Minister's uncompromising attitude towards the League of Nations²¹⁹, while Badoglio, by then commander of the forces in Ethiopia, confessed to Giuseppe Bottai his wish to lead the Italian army into the Ethiopian capital²²⁰. Alfredo Rocco and other ex-Nationalists did not conceal their delight with the prospect of "avenging Adua"²²¹. On their part, prominent members of the PNF welcomed the campaign as a real opportunity for action and a prelude to the spiritual regeneration of Italy²²². But it was also a wave, albeit ephemeral, of public enthusiasm which greeted the official declaration of the *Impero* by Mussolini on 9 May 1936. Although the occupation of the whole of Ethiopia was far from complete with the capture of Addis Abeba, there was genuine exaltation when Mussolini called the people "to salute, after fifteen centuries, the re-emergence of the *Impero* on the hills of Rome"²²³.

This implication of the Ethiopian campaign gives considerable credence to the social imperialistic argument that Mussolini's colonialism was chiefly a device of social imperialist policies²²⁴. This is only partly correct, in the sense that any other regime, Fascist or not, would have attempted to capitalise on a success against the whole international community such as the victory in Ethiopia. Undoubtedly, success in Ethiopia was not simply a territorial acquisition, but it also signified the

²¹⁸ Eatwell, R., *Fascism. A History* (London 1996), pp. 70-1; Colarizi, S., "L'opinione pubblica italiana di fronte all'intervento in guerra", in Di Nolfo, Rainero, Vigezzi (eds.), *Politica di potenza*, pp. 287-301; *ibid.*, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Rome & Bari 1991), pp. 193-7; Clark, pp. 281-2; Knox, M., *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941. Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge 1982), pp. 13-4; Hamilton, pp. 68-9

²¹⁹ Mack Smith, D., *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven & London 1989), pp. 270-1; Bottai, *Diario*, 6.11.1935

²²⁰ Bottai, G., *Diario*, 3.5.1936

²²¹ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 633ff

²²² Bottai, *Diario*, 10/25.12.1935; and pp. 35-50. Cf. the Grand Council resolution of 16.11.1935 in OO, XXVII, 183

²²³ OO, XXVII, 268f (speech in Rome, 9 May 1936), an excerpt of which is reprinted and translated in Delzell, pp. 201-2

²²⁴ Rochat, *Colonialismo*, pp. 137, 219f; Baer, G. W., *The Coming of the Italo-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge Mass 1967); Segrè, "Il colonialismo", p. 137; Guariglia, pp. 39-40, 53

restoration of Italian imperial tradition and the symbolic inauguration of the “new” Italy into the pantheon of “great powers”²²⁵. However, exclusive or primary emphasis on the diversionary function of the decision to attack Ethiopia in 1935 tends to obscure two crucial long-term implications of the campaign for the whole foreign policy of the Fascist regime. The first pertains to the geopolitical significance of the occupation of Ethiopia and the creation of the *Italian East Africa* (*Africa Orientale Italiana*). This was the culmination of a consistent colonial policy of expansion in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea which consolidated Italian control over the traditional possessions of Libya, Eritrea and Somalia, extended them with the cession of Jubaland and Jarabub, and attempted to expand the whole colonial empire with the penetration of Yemen and the occupation of Ethiopia.

The second long-term implication of the Ethiopian campaign regarded the change in Mussolini’s strategic planning for territorial expansion. The second half of 1935 proved a highly formative period for the *Duce*’s future expansionist strategy. From 1929 onwards Italian foreign policy had attempted to establish the country as the “determinant weight” and the ultimate international arbiter in a fluid European system²²⁶. Since 1933 this policy had acquired a more concrete shape with the formation of the Four Power Pact which, in De Felice’s opinion, aimed at a policy of “equidistance” between Paris and Berlin²²⁷. Despite Mussolini’s disillusionment with Nazi foreign policy after the July coup in Vienna and the unilateral introduction of conscription, the timing of the Ethiopian campaign reflected his ambition to achieve a “speedy victory” and return to his role as arbiter of the European system with enhanced prestige²²⁸. However, his disappointment with the policy of the western powers in the autumn of 1935 initiated a change in his strategic thinking which would be felt in 1936. His intransigent attitude to the Hoare-Laval plan was followed by the German-Italian agreement over Austria in January 1936 and later by the two

²²⁵ Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 195-203

²²⁶ De Felice, R., “Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana”, in De Felice (ed.), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 57-74; *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 378-9. Cf. Knox, “The fascist regime”, pp. 153-4; and “Politica estera italiana”, p. 291

²²⁷ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 415ff. For the Four Power Pact see *ibid.*, pp. 464ff

²²⁸ Rochat, *Militari*, pp. 376-9; Lowe, Marzari, Ch. 12

countries' cooperation in the Spanish Civil War²²⁹. By the beginning of 1936 the prospect of a rapprochement with Nazi Germany had ceased to be the *ultima ratio* of Mussolini's strategy²³⁰; by the autumn of the same year, after the conclusion of the Axis alliance, it was regarded as the default orientation of Italian foreign policy.

Nazi foreign policy and colonialism: a half-hearted affair

Unlike Mussolini, Hitler did not wish to antagonise the other European powers in the colonial field. For a start, he knew that he did not possess the necessary means (strong navy, economic resources) to sustain a colonial campaign. He was also aware that the Versailles Treaty had placed Germany in a highly underprivileged colonial position, from which it would be time-consuming, if not impossible at all, to recover. He therefore chose to restrict himself to the colonial *revisionist* argument, while antagonising the European powers in the continental field, for which Germany was better equipped²³¹. This left colonialism outside the nucleus of German great-power aspirations in the 1930s and reduced it to an ancillary function in the wider context of revisionism²³².

The advocates of colonialism in Germany faced two main problems. First, they were aware that the return of German colonies was meaningful only within a wider framework of anti-Versailles revisionism which included continental expansion²³³. Given, however, the emotive power of the argument for the restoration of the former German territories in Europe, colonial revisionism *per se* was less

²²⁹ For the two regimes' cooperation in the Spanish civil war see, in this study, Ch. 5, Section IIc

²³⁰ For the view that Mussolini's foreign policy remained decidedly anti-German see De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 333ff. Cf. Quartararo's view in *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, passim. See Knox's criticism of this view in "The fascist regime", pp. 153-5

²³¹ See von Neurath's relevant comments in DGFP, C, 1, pp. 256-60; and von Bülow's memo in Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. 1: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 216ff

²³² There is evidence of a change from the end of 1938 onwards, which should be associated with the disillusionment about the prospect of an alliance with Britain. Yet, there was no real divergence from the goal of eastward expansion. See Weinberg, "German Colonial Plans and Policies 1938-1942", in Besson, W., von Gärtringer, F. Freiherr (eds.), *Geschichte und Gegenwartsbewusstsein. Historische Betrachtungen und Untersuchungen. Festschrift für Hans Rothfels* (Göttingen 1963), p. 473ff; Hildebrand, "Deutsch-Mittelafrika", pp. 403f

²³³ von Strandmann, "Imperialism and Revisionism", p. 92

suitable for generating a revisionist consensus, both within and outside Germany. Second, the colonialists were divided in their arguments. Some, like Schacht, advocated the return of the colonies as an autonomous goal of German foreign policy and as a solution to Germany's postwar economic problems (raw materials, foreign exchange etc.)²³⁴. Others, like the DKG (*Deutsche Koloniale Gesellschaft*), viewed the colonial issue as a legal or prestige question of equal significance to the goal of continental revisionism²³⁵. For the former, the return of all, or part of, the German pre-war colonies was an objective in itself that would fulfil Germany's great-power aspirations through a predominant *economic* position in the international system. For the latter, it was simply a means to an end, an instrument of prestige complementary with the goal of continental revisionism in an attempt to overthrow the Versailles settlement.

Hitler's erratic political handling of the colonial issue underlined its secondary importance in the overall framework of Nazi foreign policy. In December 1935 he emphasised the link between the return of the pre-1914 German colonies and Germany's return to the Disarmament Conference, from which she had withdrawn in the autumn of 1933²³⁶. Three months later, in the shadow of the widespread alarm at the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, he made a similar offer, now relating colonial revisionism to Germany's return to the League of Nations²³⁷. At the same time, Schacht was authorised to conduct wide-ranging negotiations with British and French officials, offering the same *quid pro quo*: security in Europe, return of Germany to the collective security system, renunciation of war in return for colonial concessions²³⁸. Hitler, however, had never been a colonial enthusiast²³⁹. His

²³⁴ Schacht, H., "Germany's Colonial Demands", *Foreign Affairs*, 15 (1937), pp. 223-34. For a summary of the arguments in favour of the economic value of colonies see Schmokel, pp. 46-62

²³⁵ On the legal character of German colonial revisionism see Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Germany's Claim to Colonies*, Information Department Papers, 23 (London 1939). Again, a summary of legal and prestige arguments is given by Schmokel, pp. 63-73

²³⁶ DGFP, C, 3, 555, pp. 1062-4. See also Townsend, M. E., "The German Colonies and the Third Reich", *Political Science Quarterly*, 53 (1938), p. 197

²³⁷ Weinberg, G., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, vol. 1: *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36* (Chicago & London 1970), pp. 250ff.

²³⁸ DDI, 8th, V, 586; Schmokel, pp. 95-101; Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 279-81; Carr, *Hitler*, pp. 48ff

²³⁹ Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 320-1, 432. See also the relevant references in Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 120-43, 588ff; and Maser, W., *Hitler's Mein Kampf. An Analysis* (London 1970), pp. 117-25, 139-40; Schmokel, pp. 17ff

ephemeral interest in the colonial issue was more of a diplomatic manoeuvre than an actual political U-turn²⁴⁰. Colonial revisionism was diplomatically useful in 1935-6 in sustaining the legal attack on the concept of Versailles security, and it was even more useful in 1937-9 in keeping the channels of communication between Berlin and London open. As, however, the British government was lowering the price for an agreement with Germany (with Lord Halifax stressing that “it was not necessarily thought that the status quo must be maintained under all circumstances”²⁴¹), Hitler’s confidence after the successes of the post-1936 period made him increasingly uninterested in a colonial agreement *per se*²⁴². In the last two years before the outbreak of the war he continued to invoke the colonial argument in order to underline Germany’s unjust treatment by the victors of the First World War, but his proposals either lacked any concrete reference to specific goals or were overshadowed by the priority of continental expansion²⁴³. In two occasions, the first in November 1938 and the second in January 1939, he repeated Germany’s vague claim for a return of all pre-war colonies, but noted that this issue would not be solved by the use of force²⁴⁴. In front of his own military leadership he was even more explicit: in May 1939 he spoke of the colonies as no solution to the food and space problems of the Reich²⁴⁵. Even at the eleventh hour, in his peace offer to the British on 25 August 1939, he did include the return of the colonies to Germany as a condition for the proposed agreement (of lesser importance, though, to the revision of the German-Polish frontier) but he showed no urgency, eager to “fix the longest

²⁴⁰ See, for example, Hitler’s reference to the importance of colonies for Germany in early 1939 [Baynes, II, pp. 1574-5 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 30 January 1939)]. See also Hitler’s various references to the return of colonies in *ibid.*, II, pp. 927 (*Parteitag* at Nuremberg, 12 September 1936), 1256 (interview with the United Press, 27 November 1935), 1370-2 (speech in Augsburg, 21 November 1937).

²⁴¹ DGFP, D, 1, enclosure to Doc. 31. See also the lowering of British demands in return for Germany’s co-operation for stability in Schmökel, pp. 110-26. On the British secret plans for colonial appeasement towards Germany in 1938 see (DGFP, D, I, enclosure to Doc. 138, pp. 240ff).

²⁴² Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 688. On the meeting between Hitler and Lord Halifax, the issues discussed, and Hitler’s growing emphasis on continental issues -as opposed to the colonial ones- see Gilbert, M., Gott, R., *The Appeasers* (London 1963), pp. 95ff.

²⁴³ See, for example, Baynes, N. H. (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922 – August 1939* (New York, London & Toronto 1942), pp. 1359ff (conversation with journalists, 12 September 1937), 1389-90 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 30 January 1939); and Hitler’s comments in Müller, K.-J., *General Ludwig Beck. Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabchefs des deutschen Heers 1933-1938* (Boppard 1980), pp. 512-4.

²⁴⁴ See Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, pp. 1574-5 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 30 January 1939).

²⁴⁵ DGFP, D, 6, 433. See also Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 736-8.

possible time limit" – a flexibility he was unwilling to show with regard to the timing of the Polish campaign²⁴⁶.

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the *Führer* had a clear plan for world domination which involved the establishment of a vast colonial empire²⁴⁷. The continental focus of his exposition at the Hossbach Conference in November 1937 reaffirmed his position that Germany's *Lebensraum* lay in eastern Europe and could not be satisfied outside the continent in the form of colonies²⁴⁸. At the same time, however, Hitler was a true social Darwinist and it is difficult to imagine that his drive for expansion had a rigid territorial *terminus*²⁴⁹. In the years immediately prior to the attack on Russia he appeared convinced that success in his campaign against the Soviet Union would reduce both Britain and the USA to a state of panic and facilitate the establishment of Germany's domination not only in Europe but in the whole world²⁵⁰. Especially in the period 1939-41 he made repeated references to a vague central African empire and the domination of the Pacific alongside Japan after the eventual defeat of the USA²⁵¹. However, until 1941 his *tour d' horizon* was

²⁴⁶ Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, II, pp. 1686-9 (conversation with Sir Nevile Henderson, 25 August 1939), and Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1255-9 (conversation with Henderson, 25 August 1939); DGFP, D, 7, 265

²⁴⁷ The main exponent of this theory is Andreas Hillgruber. Among the plethora of his works and publications see *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1* (Frankfurt am Main 1965); "Der Faktor Amerika in Hitlers Strategie 1938-1941, in Hillgruber (ed.), *Deutschlands Grossmacht- und Weltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 197-222; "Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der deutschen Aussenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler", in Hillgruber (ed.), *Grossmachtpolitik und Militarismus im 20. Jahrhundert. 3 Beiträge zum Kontinuitätsproblem* (Düsseldorf 1974), pp. 11-36; Aigner, D., "Hitler's Ultimate Aims - A Programme of World Dominion?", in Koch (ed.), *Aspects*, pp. 251-66. For an analysis of Hitler's colonial aims during the Second World War see Stoecker, pp. 379-418; Hildebrand, K., "Deutsche-Mittelfrika - Ein Kriegsziel Hitlers in der Jahren 1940-1942?", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland, und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), *passim*

²⁴⁸ DGFP, D, 1, 19 (Hossbach Conference report); Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 680ff. For the Conference see also, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

²⁴⁹ See Aigner, D., "Hitler's Ultimate Aims - A Programme of World Dominion?", in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 235-50; Michaelis, M., "World Power Status or World Domination?", *Historical Journal*, 15 (1972), pp. 331-60; and Koch, H. W., "Die Rolle des Sozialdarwinismus als Faktor im Zeitalter des neuen Imperialismus um die Jahrhundertwende", *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 17 (1970), pp. 51-70

²⁵⁰ See his comments in Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 46f. For an analysis see Jäckel, E., *Hitler in History* (Hannover & London 1987), Ch. 4; Thies, J., "Hitler's European Building Programme", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1978), pp. 413-31; Aigner, pp. 262ff

²⁵¹ For references to *Mittelfrika* see Hitler's exposition to Molotov (November 1940), in DGFP, D, 11, 325/326; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 801-8. See also Hildebrand, "Deutsch-Mittelfrika". For references against the USA see Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, p. 46 (31.7.1940);

dominated by the sheer volume and significance of the Soviet Union. This was the goal which had given substance to his *Lebensraum* vision and encapsulated all his opposition to communism and the Jews. Beyond that, his plans were limited to abstract declarations, projecting his ideological belief in constant struggle and in the superiority of the German nation, but falling significantly short of a crystallised strategy for world domination. The reversal of Germany's fortunes on the eastern front from 1942 onwards prevented the widening of Hitler's expansionist horizon and ensured that such plans, even if they existed, would remain confined to Hitler's personal utopian sphere.

Expansion on the continent: beyond traditional justifications of expansion

On the continental level, the prevailing intention of the victorious powers in 1918 to agree on a stable, long-lasting territorial pattern to the European map manifested their determination to establish a semi-permanent territorial settlement in Europe and to stave off future territorial disputes. Even if the invocation of the revisionist and irredentist principles came to be seen as a legitimate argument for frontier readjustments (as in the case of Fiume, Austria and the Sudetenland), claims for further aggressive territorial revisions were unacceptable by the main guarantors of the Versailles system. The sensitivity of the European Great Powers to territorial revision on the continent was shown on a number of occasions, from the reaction to the occupation of the Corfu in 1923 to the formation of the Stresa front in 1935 and the Munich conference in September 1938.

Nevertheless, ever since the 1920s, the Italian Fascist foreign policy had displayed double standards regarding the principle of maintaining European stability. While the participation of Italy at the Lausanne conference and in the Locarno pacts had turned her into one of the pillars of the European *status quo*, Mussolini's Balkan policy entailed the expansion of Italian interests in the region without ruling out the use of military force to effect territorial changes. Apart from the Corfu incident and

Aigner, pp. 254f. See an interesting discussion and assessment of the various arguments in Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 125-30

the plans for war against Turkey and Yugoslavia in the early 1920s, the *Duce* continued to plot with Croat and Macedonian separatists against the integrity of the Yugoslav state and to entertain hopes of a civil war which would justify Italian intervention. At the same time, his geopolitical designs included a consolidation of Italy's position in Albania, something that was achieved with consensual, rather than military, methods after the two treaties of 1926 and 1927²⁵².

The shift of Mussolini's attention to the *politica periferica* from 1932 onwards did provide an ephemeral diversion from aggressive plans in the Balkans. The traditional diplomats were relieved that the turn to east Africa entailed the abandonment of the "Croat plan" in favour of a more traditional policy of colonial expansion²⁵³. However, with the successful conclusion of the Ethiopian campaign in May 1936, Mussolini felt obliged to return to the issue of the European balance of power, reconsidering his policy options in the light of French hostility and the resurgence of Nazi Germany. Participation in the Spanish Civil War was the first indication that the *Duce* intended to use aggressive means on the continent to promote his wider geopolitical ambitions in the Mediterranean, in defiance of international agreements and the need to uphold stability in the continent. This prospect alarmed the traditional diplomats and the King, who feared an irreversible re-orientation of Italian foreign policy towards Nazi Germany²⁵⁴. Such fears were strengthened after the official declaration of the Axis alliance in 1936, the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact and Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1937²⁵⁵. Yet, the pro-German tendency in Italian foreign policy remained short of a definite commitment until 1939. If Mussolini conceived the 1937 pact with Yugoslavia as a means to subvert the cohesion of the Little Entente and limit French influence in the Balkans²⁵⁶, he also showed increasing alarm at German expansion

²⁵² For all these issues see, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

²⁵³ Robertson, E. M., *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER. Europe and Africa, 1932-36* (London & Basingstoke 1977), pp. 84-5; Rumi, G., "'Revisionismo' fascista ed espansione coloniale", pp. 461-4

²⁵⁴ Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, pp. 272-4

²⁵⁵ For the declaration of the Axis alliance see Delzell, pp. 201-2. For the withdrawal from the League of Nations see DGFP, D, 1, 67; Quartararo, R., "Appendice a Inghilterra e Italia. Dal Patto di Pasqua a Monaco", *Storia Contemporanea*, 7 (1976), pp. 648-716, here pp. 663f

²⁵⁶ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 294-6

southwards with the *Anschluss* and the annexation of the Sudetenland²⁵⁷. During 1938, extensive talks with Britain took place on the Italian initiative²⁵⁸, leading to the Easter Accords of April 1938 which were meant to discourage German aggressive intentions against Czechoslovakia²⁵⁹.

As, however, the European system gradually disintegrated into chaos in 1938-39 as a result of German aggression, Mussolini identified new opportunities for making forceful changes in the Balkan territorial *status quo*. His major expansionist initiative in the period before the outbreak of the Second World War, namely the invasion of Albania in April 1939, appeared as the logical conclusion of his Adriatic policy ever since the mid-1920s. He considered Albania as instrumental for Italy's Mediterranean aspirations in two ways - first, because of its geographic position at the entrance to the Adriatic Sea and, second, as a bulwark against both Yugoslavia and Greece. In a meeting of the Council of Ministers in December 1936 he described the establishment of a semi-protectorate in 1927 over Albania as a political anomaly, creating "an Italian province without a prefect"²⁶⁰. He reiterated emphatically the geopolitical argument in his speech to the Grand Council in February 1939, adding that Albania was the only concrete territorial goal of Italian foreign policy in the continent²⁶¹. Furthermore, the geopolitical importance of the country was complemented by its historic ties with Italian culture and civilisation throughout the centuries. A plethora of studies on Albania were published in Italy during the late 1930s, emphasising the "racial" and "cultural affinities between the two peoples, as well as their difference from the predominantly Slav character of Yugoslavia"²⁶².

²⁵⁷ See, for example, Ciano's remarks quoted in Bottai, *Diario*, 24.11.1938

²⁵⁸ Ciano's *Diaries*, 18.2.1938; DGFP, D, 1, 119

²⁵⁹ Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, pp. 376ff; "Appendice a Inghilterra e Italia. Dal Patto di Pasqua a Monaco"; Candeloro, pp. 419ff

²⁶⁰ Bottai, 5.12.1936. This contradicts Pastorelli's assertion that Italian policy towards Albania changed in the late-1930s from respecting the territorial integrity of the country to an annexationist direction. See Pastorelli, P., *Italia e Albania, 1924-1927* (Florence 1967); and "La storiografia italiana del dopoguerra sulla politica estera fascista", *Storia e Politica*, 10 (1971), pp. 603f

²⁶¹ Deakin, pp. 5-6. See also Casella, F., "L'immagine fascista dell'Impero: quale ruolo all'Adriatico?", in Di Nolfo, E., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan 1986), pp. 189-95

²⁶² Casella, pp. 193-5; Bianchini, S., "L'idea fascista dell'impero nell'area danubiano-balcanica", in Di Nolfo, Rainero, Vigezzi (eds.), pp. 173-82

The annexation of Albania in April 1939 prompted Mussolini to restate the country's significance as a "geographic 'constant'" in Italy's Mediterranean aspirations and to conclude that this success had transformed the Adriatic into an "Italian lake"²⁶³. Although the idea that Albania held the key to the balance of power in the Balkan region was grossly exaggerated, these statements shed light on Mussolini's subsequent tactics towards Yugoslavia and Greece in the spring and summer of 1939. With the fall of Stoyadinovic early in 1939, Mussolini abandoned his brief flirtation with Yugoslav friendship, based on the pact of 1937, and reverted to the policy of internal subversion with the co-operation of Croat separatism²⁶⁴. In June 1939 Ciano spoke of the need to consolidate the success in Albania by dismembering Yugoslavia, taking the whole of Dalmatia and creating "a territorial continuity as far as Albania"²⁶⁵. At the same time, after the Greek rejection of the Italian proposal for renewing the 1928 Pact of Friendship, Mussolini started thinking in terms of using Albania to put pressure on Greece or even launching a military campaign towards the Aegean Sea. In August, he ordered the drafting of such a plan to be used in the contingency of a large-scale European war²⁶⁶.

With the exception of the consistent policy towards Albania, the shift of Italian foreign policy towards expansion in the Balkans reflected the geopolitical reasoning of a Mediterranean *mare nostrum* but lacked either definite medium-term expansionist priorities or a crystallised long-term strategy of alliances. The expansionist venture in Albania and the continuous subversion of Yugoslav and Greek interests underlined Mussolini's determination to promote a wide expansionist vision in the Balkans which would complement his peripheral strategy in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Ethiopia-Yemen). In this sense, the conjunction of aggressive colonial and continental expansion in the 1935-39 period advanced a single long-term vision, but the uncertainty about both German and British intentions encouraged Mussolini to experiment with a number of diplomatic and military options. Undoubtedly, his increasing willingness to use military force against his

²⁶³ Bottai, 13.4.1939; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 326-30

²⁶⁴ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 323-9; Candeloro, vol. 9, pp. 478-9; Jankovic, B. M., *The Balkans in International Relations* (Basingstoke & London 1988), pp. 160-1

²⁶⁵ Bottai, 9.6.1939. Cf. the references in Baldacci, A., *Scritti Adriatici* (Bologna 1943), pp. 126ff

²⁶⁶ DDI, 8th, XIII, 162

Balkan neighbours marked a departure from the post-1918 liberal policy of peaceful co-existence and acknowledgement of the Balkan *status quo*. Another departure began during the Ethiopian campaign, which strengthened the pro-German orientation of Italian foreign policy. However, taking Salvemini's view of the Ethiopian war as presage to Italy's participation in an Axis war or presenting Italy's entry into the war in 1940 as a culmination of her aggressive policy in 1935-39²⁶⁷ disregards the fact that the tactical flexibility of Mussolini's foreign policy during that period mirrored a lack of clear interim strategies and an uncertainty about the opportunities offered by the international system for the advancement of his Mediterranean vision. Therefore, the use of geopolitical and historic irredentist arguments to justify the gathering pace of Italian expansionism in the late-1930s may be seen as evidence of long-term intentions but not of a categorical guiding principle which dictated short-term action.

In Germany, the focus of the revisionist and irredentist agenda on territorial readjustments in Europe gave a predominantly continental character to the Nazi expansionist policies. Until the summer of 1938 Hitler had adhered to the logic of the "artichoke theory", extending the Reich's territory in the west (Rhineland) and the south (Austria) while gradually rebuilding Germany's military might and strengthening her strategic position in central Europe. He was aware of the need to present his expansionist ventures as legitimate actions originating from the "unjust" Versailles settlement and the principle of uniting the whole German population within the territory of the Reich. This was plainly reflected in the wording of the Operation Otto for Austria which was drafted on 11 March 1938 and stated that the *Anschluss* should be presented "in the form of a peaceful entry welcomed by the population"²⁶⁸.

In this sense, there was a major qualitative difference between the annexation of Austria and the preparation for Operation Green against Czechoslovakia later in 1938. Although Hitler had since 1937 expressed his intention to liquidate the *whole* of Czechoslovakia, his initial plan involved a pre-emptive strike in the context of a

²⁶⁷ Petersen, pp. 45ff

²⁶⁸ The relevant excerpt is translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 703

future war against France²⁶⁹. However, in the aftermath of the Hossbach Conference he spoke of his intention to carry out “an offensive war against Czechoslovakia” in order to “solve the German problem of living space”²⁷⁰. The same plan envisaged the execution of the operation even “before the completion of Germany’s full preparedness for war” if there were indications that there would be no opposition from the western powers to the plan. This latter assumption did not contradict the views of the traditional military leadership, since General Beck had already been working on the offensive plan against Czechoslovakia on condition that Britain would remain neutral. However, by the end of May 1938 Hitler had again altered his plan for Operation Green - now the crisis was described as unavoidable²⁷¹ and the liquidation of the whole Czechoslovak state would take place “in the near future”. For the first time, the *Führer* was determined to pursue a large-scale space policy without seeking recourse to the legitimate argument of irredentism and was willing not simply to await, but to “bring about the suitable moment”²⁷².

The escalation of the Czech crisis during the summer and early autumn of 1938 divided not just the army generals but also the Nazi leadership down the middle. The views of General Beck, the Secretary of State von Weizsäcker, Goebbels and Göring converged upon a platform of opposing a military showdown as potentially disastrous for Germany. This widespread opposition may have weighed upon Hitler’s mind and led him to change his mind on 28 September and accept the proposal for an international conference²⁷³. Equally influential must have been Mussolini’s decision to request a postponement of the military mobilisation and to endorse Chamberlain’s proposal for a negotiated compromise solution²⁷⁴. If, however, the crisis was temporarily resolved with the Munich Agreement and the cession of only the Sudetenland to Germany, the events of August-September 1938

²⁶⁹ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 690-1; Deist, W., *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament* (London & Basingstoke 1981), pp. 86ff

²⁷⁰ DGFP, D, 3, 560-1 (Ribbentrop’s reports on economic agreements with Spain, 6 April 1938)

²⁷¹ Müller, *General Ludwig Beck. Studien und Dokumente zur politisch-militärischen Vorstellungswelt und Tätigkeit des Generalstabchefs des deutschen Heers 1933-1938* (Boppard 1980), pp. 511ff

²⁷² DGFP, D, 2, 358. The Czech crisis is discussed in full detail in Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany. Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago 1980), Chs. 10-11

²⁷³ Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 452-3

²⁷⁴ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 720-1; Weinberg, *Hitler*, 116f

were indicative of far-reaching changes in Hitler's foreign policy²⁷⁵. The *Führer* now appeared to be working on the assumption that Britain would not oppose German expansion in central Europe, not because of a lack of interest in the region but mainly due to her military unpreparedness which would not allow an effective military action before 1941 or 1942²⁷⁶. The opposition of Beck, Göring and Goebbels to "Operation Green" originated from their rejection of exactly this strategic assumption²⁷⁷. For them, it had become obvious that Hitler was thinking in terms of a "lightning" campaign which assumed British non-involvement but no longer depended on it²⁷⁸. However, on this point the predicaments of Göring and Goebbels diverged from those of the traditional conservative elites in the armed forces and the *Wilhelmstrasse*. Göring was not averse to the idea of a general war, although he wished to first exhaust the function of diplomatic compromise and peaceful expansion in the pattern of the *Anschluss*. He was aware of German military and economic unpreparedness for an all-out war and would have preferred to risk a major confrontation only after full mobilisation and fighting power had been achieved, especially after the conclusion of the airforce rearmament programme²⁷⁹. He nevertheless viewed a German victory in a general war as possible even in 1938 and proceeded with the preparations for a showdown with Czechoslovakia²⁸⁰. For Beck, however, the possibility of risking a war against a great coalition of western powers for the sake of a secondary target such as Czechoslovakia was inconceivable²⁸¹. He was conscious that the whole strategic planning of the army rested on the assumption that a conflict with Britain and France should be avoided, if not altogether, at least until the early 1940s. His active objections reflected the traditional military view that the army should co-decide both the military and the political prerequisites for action, as opposed to Hitler's opinion that there should be a clear separation of jurisdictions.

²⁷⁵ DGFP, D, 2, 675 (Munich Agreement, 29 September 1938); Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 718-20

²⁷⁶ Müller, *Beck*, pp. 512ff

²⁷⁷ Müller, K.-J., *Das Heer und Hitler. Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime, 1933-1944* (Stuttgart 1956), pp. 309-33; Beck, pp. 651ff; Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 140ff; *Starting World War II*, pp. 384-6

²⁷⁸ Hill, L. (ed.), *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere, 1933-1950* (Frankfurt 1974), pp. 136-7

²⁷⁹ Deist, *German Rearmament*, pp. 66-8

²⁸⁰ Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 387-8

²⁸¹ Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 142-3

Contrary to Beck, the new leadership of the *Wehrmacht*, Keitel and Brauchitsch, had also come to accept Hitler's view and went on dutifully to translate Hitler's political instructions into military action²⁸². They removed Beck's political arguments from his first memorandum in May 1938 before showing it to Hitler²⁸³. Therefore, while Beck expressed a political assessment of Nazi foreign and military policy, the adherence of Brauchitsch and Keitel to Hitler's strategy was irrelevant to their own personal and political beliefs. Having accepted Hitler's monopoly of authority in the handling of foreign affairs, any expression of disapproval would be incongruous.

The shift of Hitler's strategy to a high-risk space policy was not disguised by the irredentist justification behind the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia at Munich. Less than a month after the agreement, he gave explicit orders for the liquidation of the "remainder of the Czech state" at any time²⁸⁴. This obscurity, however, regarding the timing of the operation reflected a much wider uncertainty about his short-term strategies and priorities. During the last months of 1938 Hitler turned his attention back to Poland. As he confessed to his generals in August 1939, his preference was for a compromise solution over Danzig before a war with the west²⁸⁵. He therefore ordered Ribbentrop to approach the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, Lipski, with concrete proposals for the incorporation of the Free City to the Reich in return for a guarantee to respect Polish sovereignty and a renewal of the 1934 pact²⁸⁶. The proposal, first presented in October and renewed in November 1938²⁸⁷, was met with a flat rejection by the Polish government²⁸⁸. By the time the Polish leader, Beck, came to Berlin to discuss the issue with Hitler (January 1939) and to propose a division of the Free City between the two countries, the Chancellor had reverted to a puzzlingly intransigent position, ruling out any compromise solution and demanding nothing less than the return of the whole city²⁸⁹. In the meantime, he had readjusted

²⁸² Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 114-5, 139-42

²⁸³ Müller, *Heer und Hitler*, pp. 302ff

²⁸⁴ DGFP, D, 4, 81 (Directive, 21 October 1938)

²⁸⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1234-40 (speech to generals, 22 August 1939)

²⁸⁶ ADAP, D, 5, 86; Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 121-8

²⁸⁷ ADAP, D, 5, 112

²⁸⁸ Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 497ff

²⁸⁹ For the negotiations see DGFP, D, 5, 120-121 (Ribbentrop's and Weizsäcker's reports, January 1939). For Hitler's reply see Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 733-4; Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 123-8

his strategy - Poland would be dealt with first, after the liquidation of the rump Czech state which was traditionally regarded as a strategic prerequisite for any attack on Poland²⁹⁰. Within three weeks from the march into the rest of Czechoslovakia, Hitler issued instructions for Operation White against Poland which envisaged the completion of preparations by 1 September²⁹¹. The new strategic plan prioritised a “lightning” action (*Blitz*) to destroy the Polish state and armed forces”, then war with the west and finally “turning against the east”²⁹². His decision to attack was accompanied by a unilateral abandonment of negotiations with Poland at the beginning of April²⁹³.

German foreign policy after the end of 1937 confirmed the shift from the limited *border* policy of the previous years to the *living space* principle which underpinned the large-scale expansionist ventures of the Nazi regime in the following years. The “expansion in the east” theme dominated the rationale of Hitler’s major foreign policy actions and strategic moves, adding an element of *historic* urgency to his *Lebensraum* vision and relegating colonial goals to a secondary, if not insignificant, level of importance. Although the territorial objectives of Nazi expansion in 1938-39 were shared by the conservative military and diplomatic elites, the *Führer*’s decision to force the pace of expansion, disrupt traditional priorities, use the military power of his armed forces and risk a major confrontation were in sharp contrast to the long-term strategic planning of the conservative establishment. Having said that, even by the beginning of 1939 Hitler did not appear to know what kind of war he wanted. His experiments with Poland between autumn 1938 and spring 1939 forced him to adjust his strategic plans, abandoning his initial proposal for turning Poland into an essentially vassal state of Germany and choosing instead to invade the country²⁹⁴. He was unsure of the British attitude and had no tangible indication of Russian intentions towards Poland and Germany. By the time he spoke

²⁹⁰ DGFP, D, 5, 139

²⁹¹ DGFP, D, 6, 149/185; Robertson, E. M., “German Mobilisation Preparations and the Treaties between Germany and the Soviet Union of August and September 1939”, in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M. (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke & London 1989), pp. 330-66, here pp. 330-6

²⁹² Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1234ff (22 August 1939); Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, p. 558

²⁹³ DGFP, D, 6, 159/169

²⁹⁴ Bullock, A., *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny* (Harmondsworth 1962), pp. 325-6

to the army commanders of 23 May he seemed poised to unleash his military machine but betrayed his uncertainty as to the west's attitude and the most favourable date for the invasion. His strategy regarding the conflict continued to change in the few following months in the face of international developments and was not crystallised until the last days of August²⁹⁵.

V: Conclusions

According to fascist ideology, foreign policy was meant to be the instrument of mediation between the political and the mythical, between reality and utopia, in order to promote the large-scale historic vision of a new territorial order. Yet, for a long time after the assumption of power by Mussolini and Hitler their foreign policy objectives followed traditional priorities and entertained a high degree of support from traditional political, military and diplomatic figures. This continuity with previous liberal policies was a necessity for the fascist regimes not simply because of the circumstances in which they were forced to operate (coalition cabinets, institutional checks, international fears) but also because the two leaders lacked concrete short- and medium-term strategies for promoting their expansionist visions. Therefore, their adherence to traditional arguments, such as revisionism, irredentism and colonialism, served an important triple function. First, it upheld the impression of continuity and thus alleviated initial fears about fascist intentions, on both the domestic and the international level. Second, it provided possibilities for *legitimate* expansion in an international system that was particularly sensitive to territorial issues after the trauma of the First World War. Third, it also offered a guiding principle for short- and medium-term action in the handling of foreign affairs. Each traditional argument fulfilled a different but significant function. Revisionism provided a legal argument for disguising and legitimising territorial claims and undermined the permanent character of the Versailles territorial settlement. Irredentism offered the opportunity to use the same principle which underpinned border readjustments at the Paris Peace Conference, namely national self-

²⁹⁵ This issue is discussed later in this study, Ch. 6, Section II

determination, in order to justify further territorial claims. Finally, colonialism became a bargaining trump card when the circumstances did not allow expansion on the continent and was also used as the currency of political prestige in the European system.

However, there were limits to this continuity between liberal and fascist foreign policies. Both fascist regimes treated the traditional expansionist arguments and claims with selectivity, even to the point of abandoning some of them altogether (Germany's policy in South Tyrol, Eupen-Malmedy, Alsace). They also gave early indications of more far-reaching designs which transgressed what was generally regarded as *legitimate* expansion (Corfu incident, the July 1934 putsch in Vienna). At the same time, each regime laid different emphasis on the various expansionist arguments: while the Italian regime integrated colonial, irredentist and revisionist claims into its expansionist agenda, Nazi foreign policy focused on continental expansionist objectives, displaying only a sporadic and vague interest in colonial goals. The selective treatment of the traditional arguments and the varying degrees of emphasis on them by each regime can only be adequately understood as an indication of specific underlying geopolitical priorities in the foreign policies of the two fascist regimes.

The radicalisation of Italian and German expansionism in the mid- and late-1930s entailed both a quantitative and a qualitative change. It rested on a shift from border to living space policy, alluding to more ambitious, large-scale territorial goals both on the continent and, for Italy, in the colonial field too. Since most of these goals went beyond what the guarantors of the Versailles system perceived as *legitimate* expansion, their attainment presupposed the increasing use of military means instead of diplomatic procedures. Although a start was made with the Italian aggressive campaign against Ethiopia, it was the Nazi regime which started to gravitate towards war from 1938 onwards at a time when Mussolini strove to keep his options open by experimenting with both diplomatic and military strategies. Having said that, there was a high degree of continuity between the early objectives of Fascist expansion and the more radical goals of the late-1930s. Mussolini's east African and Adriatic ventures were intended to consolidate or extend previous successes, while Hitler's expansion in Austria and Czechoslovakia rested upon the

Wehrmacht's restored military capacity through rearmament and, in the case of the *Anschluss*, aimed to succeed where there had been failure in the past (Vienna putsch). This continuity underlined the determination of both fascist leaderships to exploit opportunities offered and to produce favourable conditions for the promotion of their long-term designs for acquiring vast living space in eastern Europe (for Germany) and the Mediterranean region (for Italy).

War had come significantly closer in 1938-39, as the two regimes showed an increasing determination to pursue their more extensive territorial objectives. Yet, the ideological nature of the two leaders' expansionist visions cannot on its own account for the occurrence of the *particular* military conflict which Germany started in September 1939 and Italy joined in July 1940. Their strategies and priorities continued to be affected by both domestic and international developments not only in the remaining period until the beginning of the war but also throughout the duration of the conflict. The next two chapters will examine the conditions which gave the final momentum to the radicalisation of the two regimes' foreign policies and defined the parameters as well as the fate of the great fascist war.

CHAPTER 5

Between co-operation and rivalry: Italian and German expansionism and the radicalisation of fascist foreign policies (1933-1939)

I: Introduction

In one of the concluding remarks of his study on Nazi foreign policy Klaus Hildebrand emphasises the need to set the evolution of Hitler's foreign policy "in the historical context of international politics in the 1930s and 1940s". In this way, he continues, it will become easier "to establish how far Hitler was able to influence the course of world affairs during the twelve years of his rule, and how far international circumstances enabled him to carry out his plans or forced him to limit or modify them"¹. This raises the question of the relation between ideological goals and political actions in the realm of fascist foreign policy. The questions he asks about Nazi Germany are relevant to the nature of foreign policy under fascism in both Germany and Italy. If there is a consensus among researchers about the traditional "revisionism" of fascist foreign policies in the first stages of the two regimes' domestic consolidation, the radicalisation of fascist expansionism in the second half of the 1930s remains an issue of heated historical debate. Hildebrand's conclusion seems to suggest that, notwithstanding the validity of the primacy-of-domestic-politics thesis, the analysis of the Italian and German fascist foreign policies in the 1930s requires a wider European or even international perspective. This would enable us to extend beyond the domestic origins and functions of foreign policy decisions, and beyond the debate about their ideological consistency, in order to

¹ Hildebrand, K., *The Third Reich* (London 1984), p. 151

relate foreign policy ambitions with the opportunities and limitations arising from the international situation.

Inevitably, the radicalisation of the Italian and German foreign policies in the late 1930s has been conceptualised in terms of the principal historiographical debate about the programmatic or not character of expansionist foreign policies. A distinct and influential branch of the intentionalist approach has acknowledged the primacy of ideological considerations in the shaping of Fascist and Nazi foreign policies². In this sense, radicalisation has been interpreted as the logical, pre-meditated, and indispensable product of the two regimes' programmes and the two leaders' *Weltanschauungen*. However, this alleged primacy of ideological considerations in foreign policy decision-making has been challenged with reference both to Italian and German fascist foreign policy in three different ways. *First*, the two regimes were accused of being primarily social imperialist. A number of interpretations has focused on the impact of the domestic grievances that the economic crises of 1929-32 and 1935-38 inflicted upon the Italian and German regimes respectively. The danger of diminishing credibility and internal collapse of fascism dictated a diversion of discontent outwards, and it appeared that the two fascist regimes could capitalise on the popular issues of revisionism and "great power" aspirations by pursuing more aggressive foreign policies *regardless* of previous ideological pronouncements³.

Second, the radicalisation of the Italian and German foreign policies in the late 1930s has been seen in the light of the two regimes' need to complete their domestic consolidation by "conquering" the last strongholds of the traditional élite groups⁴. Successful aggressive expansion expected to foster the prestige of the fascist leaderships which, in turn, would eventually enable them to destroy the remaining

² Amongst a great number of intentionalist studies see Jäckel, E., *Hitler's Weltanschauung. A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown, Connecticut. 1972); Trevor-Roper, H. R., "Hitlers Kriegsziele", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 8 (1960), pp. 121-33

³ This approach is more common with regard to Italian fascism. See Baer, G. W., *La guerra italo-etiopeica e la crisi dell'equilibrio europeo* (Bari 1970); Catalano, F., *L'economia italiana di guerra. La politica economico-finanziaria del fascismo dalla guerra d'Etiopia alla caduta del regime, 1935-1943* (Milan 1969); Di Nolfo, A., *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana, 1919-1933* (Padova 1960). For Germany, see Mommsen, H., "Ausnahmestand als Herrschaftstechnik des Nationalsozialistischen Regimes", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte: Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 30-45

⁴ Knox, "Conquest", pp. 43ff, and "Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships", in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 115-33

checks to their political dominance. Despite the different nature of these checks between the two countries (the Vatican, the Crown and the conservative circles around it in Italy; the powerful military-industrial élites and the conservative political groups in Germany), the changes in the expansionist policies of the two regimes could be seen as manifestations of the common desire to strengthen their domestic authority and thus promote the vision of a truly “fascist” state.

Third, the new aggressive tone in the Italian and German foreign policies in the late 1930s was also perceived as the only feasible response of the two regimes to the mounting domestic deadlocks. This approach, however, departs from the traditional social imperialist theory in that it interprets these changes as indications of the two regimes’ diminishing ability to sustain their initial domestic and foreign policies. In the 1936-8 period both Mussolini and Hitler came to face increasingly inauspicious circumstances in the conduct of their domestic and foreign policies. In Germany, the growing pace of rearmament placed considerable strains on an economic planning that was unwilling either to reduce military spending or to restrict demand for consumer products. In Italy, the cost of the Ethiopian campaign and the involvement in the Spanish civil war hampered the regime’s ability either to engage in a more rational economic planning or to achieve an effective preparation for war. At the same time, both countries were faced with an unstable diplomatic conjuncture, isolated from the “western democracies” and distrustful of each other. In this sense, expansion, aggression and even war were not so much choices (as in the social imperialist thesis), but rather the inevitable product of the internal pressures and the suppressed dynamism of the two fascist regimes.

All these approaches seem to disregard the importance of Hildebrand’s suggestion about the international dimension in the radicalisation on Italian and German foreign policies. Without ignoring the decisive role of domestic considerations in foreign policy decision-making, we should not forget that the foreign policies of fascist Italy and Germany evolved within a European state system based on ideas of balance-of-power and security. The problem with studying foreign policies as simply domestic phenomena, as continuities and discontinuities with national history, is that it may produce misleading conclusions about the significance of international relations in the implementation of a foreign policy. It may also inflate

the role of personalities (as happened in the case of the "Hitlerite" and "Mussolinian" approaches) or the ability of a state to implement its foreign policy plans regardless of international circumstances. It is, therefore, essential to incorporate all the elements which defined the shaping of fascist foreign policies (ideology, opportunism, social imperialism, domestic crises) into a wider international framework, and to see how the intentions and actions of the Italian or the German regime interacted with the intentions and actions of the other European states.

The first systematic attempt was made in the 1960s by A. J. P. Taylor, who produced a study of international relations in the 1930s and located the main causes of the Second World War in the escalating tension between the main European powers. Although Taylor's work was supposed to be a general account of the origins of the war from an international perspective, it focused heavily on Nazi Germany and Hitler, making only limited - and often dismissive - references to the responsibility of Italian Fascism⁵. In a similar vein, G. Salvemini played down the responsibility of the Italian Fascist regime for the outbreak and escalation of the war. In his famous arithmetic of blame, he attributed five-tenths of the guilt to Hitler, three-tenths to Stalin and only one-tenth to Mussolini's alleged reckless and irresponsible opportunism⁶. In 1980, R. Quartararo published an extraordinary account of Italian foreign policy in the 1930s from the viewpoint of Italian-British relations. Building upon De Felice's and A. F. K. Organski's distinction between Nazi radical expansionism and Fascist more traditionalist foreign policy, she interpreted the radicalisation of Mussolini's expansionist policies as the consequence of his frustration with the unresponsive British attitude to Italian overtures and the alliance with Nazi Germany as the last alternative to diplomatic isolation⁷.

What, however, neither of the above works sufficiently emphasised is the element of interaction between the two fascist regimes themselves. The classic study of Elisabeth Wiskemann *The Rome-Berlin Axis* covers basically the years after 1935

⁵ Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961); Carr, W., "National Socialism: Foreign Policy and Wehrmacht", in Laqueur, W. (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Harmondsworth 1979), p. 119

⁶ Salvemini, G., *Prelude to the Second World War* (London 1953), pp. 515f

⁷ Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome 1980); Organski, A. F. K., *The Forms of Political Development* (New York 1965); De Felice, R., *Intervista sul fascismo* (Bari 1975)

and is dominated by an emphasis on the importance of Nazi foreign policy for the radicalisation of fascist expansionism after 1937, while J. Petersen's work *Hitler und Mussolini* focuses on the interaction between the two fascist leaders in the pre-1937 period, and does not therefore provide sufficient information on the reasons behind the radicalisation of fascist expansionism after 1937⁸. The influence of Italian Fascism on the Nazi system should not be underestimated, and Italian foreign policy in the second half of the 1930s should not be interpreted simply as slavishly copying German expansionism, as first G. Salvemini and then D. Mack Smith and Wiskemann attempted to prove⁹. Through the interaction of their different expansionist visions Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany gradually established an idiosyncratic bilateral relationship that should be treated as a distinct aspect of the two regimes' expansionist policies¹⁰. The aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the importance of the exclusive political relation between the two fascist regimes for the radicalisation of Italian and German expansionist policies in the second half of the 1930s. It traces the origins of the process which led to the diplomatic convergence of Italy and Germany after 1935 and eventually produced a joint programme of expansion to be carried out collectively by the two fascist regimes. This *internationalisation* of the fascist expansionist vision, namely the co-ordination of the two expansionist policies and their incorporation into a wider framework of fascist territorial expansion, is the main focus of this chapter. Its importance lies in the changes it caused to the initial ideological and geopolitical doctrines of the two regimes, but also in the dynamism it released after the rapprochement of the two fascist regimes. This dynamism was not simply the sum of their cumulative energies, as the antagonism and mutual suspicion of the pre-1935 period survived after their diplomatic rapprochement after 1935. It is important to show that both the "political

⁸ Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis. The History of the Relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (London 1966); J. Petersen's, *Hitler und Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933-1936* (Tübingen 1973)

⁹ Salvemini, *Preludio*, passim; *ibid.*, *Dal patto di Londra alla pace di Roma* (Turin 1925); Mack Smith, D., *Italy* (1969, 2nd ed.); Wiskemann, E., *Fascism in Italy* (London & Basingstoke 1970), pp. 65ff. Wiskemann, however, acknowledges the impact of Italian fascism on Nazism in the 1920s [op. cit., Ch. 7]

¹⁰ For an overview of this debate see Azzi, "Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy", pp. 187-203

dynamism" of the alliance between the two fascist regimes¹¹ and their still antagonistic relations within the Axis contributed equally to the radicalisation of fascist expansionism after 1935.

II. Internationalisation of fascism: the difficult course of the Italo-German rapprochement

Mussolini as "the *Duce* of Fascism" and the emergence of Nazism

If the internationalisation of fascism has been related to the new diplomatic situation produced by the Ethiopian campaign and the Spanish Civil War, its origins should be located in the period between 1929 and 1935. From the March on Rome up to Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor the Italian Fascist regime remained the only political expression of the new "fascist" creed. Despite his dealings, either secret or official, with other European fascist movements and revisionist regimes, for the greatest part of the 1920s Mussolini insisted on the purely *national* character of Italian Fascism. As a reaction to the internationalism of his previous comrades, and now arch-enemies, in the Socialist and Communist parties, he renounced any aspiration to "export" Fascism. Even his contacts with the German nationalists (and most notably with NSDAP officials¹²) should be seen in the wider framework of his efforts to subvert the European Versailles system by encouraging the activities of various revisionist groups and countries. His principal aim was to promote his country's long-standing revisionist-expansionist aspirations in central Europe and the Mediterranean regardless of future alliances. In the absence of another discontented

¹¹ Funke, M., *Sanktionen und Kanonen. Hitler, Mussolini und der nationale Abessinienkonflikt 1935-1936* (Düsseldorf 1970), p. 102ff; *ibid.*, "Die deutsche-italienische Beziehungen: Anti-bolschewismus und aussenpolitische Interessenkonkurrenz als Strukturprinzip der 'Achse'", in Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, pp. 828-30

¹² See Cassels, A., *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, New Jersey 1970), pp. 135-174; Pese, W. W., "Hitler und Italien, 1920-1928", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (1955), pp. 113-26; Ludecke, K. G. W. L., *I Knew Hitler* (New York 1937), and an assessment of the book by Layton, R. V. Jr., "Kurt Ludecke and 'I Knew Hitler'. An Evaluation", *Central European History*, 12 (1979), pp. 372-86; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler. Zwei Wege - Gleiches Ende* (Würzburg 1977), pp. 176-81

country that was powerful enough to energetically challenge the postwar territorial arrangements, Mussolini played a dubious diplomatic role in the 1920s. On the one hand, especially after his acquiescence in the Locarno Treaties in 1925, he figured prominently among the guarantors of the European order. On the other hand, even during this period of "good behaviour" in foreign affairs, the Italian Fascist leadership never refrained from conspiring with Croat separatists, Bavarian nationalists, Hungarian revisionists, Maltese nationalists, Corsican separatists and others at the expense of the European stability it was supposed to defend¹³. Clearly, however, these dealings did not reflect any wider scheme for a new fascist order in Europe; they were rather exercises in political activism which originated from the traditional Italian "great power" ambitions.

The landscape started to change in the autumn of 1930. In the celebrations for the eight anniversary of the March on Rome Mussolini for the first time declared that Fascism was an "export product". Two years later, in his *Doctrine of Fascism*, he went even further and presented Fascism as a doctrine of universal applicability:

"If every age has its own characteristic doctrine, there are a thousand signs which point to Fascism as the characteristic doctrine of our time. ... Fascism has henceforth in the world the universality of all these doctrines [socialism, liberalism, democracy] which, in realising themselves, have represented a stage in the history of the human spirit."¹⁴

In presenting the Italian Fascist prototype as the new "conquering creed" of the twentieth century¹⁵ Mussolini was essentially responding to new international challenges. First, he wished to establish Fascism as a real political alternative - and not a simple short-term reaction or crisis phenomenon - to the crumbling liberal-democratic system, and as a barrier to the spread of the Marxist doctrine. Second, and most important, he intended to establish *Italian* Fascism as the ideological model and

¹³ Robertson, E. M., *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER. Italy and Africa 1932-1936* (London & Basingstoke 1977), pp. 18ff (Malta), 24ff (Croatia); Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 304f, 308, 316-8; DDI, 7th, V-VIII, passim (for Ustasi); 7th, I, 259 (Malta), 268 (Hungary), 282 (Corsica). See also, in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

¹⁴ Mussolini, B., *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions* (Rome 1935), reprinted in Oakeshott, M. (ed.), *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (New York 1949), pp. 178-9. See also Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 310-1

¹⁵ Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis*. See also, in this study, Ch. 2, Section II

the political Mecca of right-wing polemic against socialism and liberal democracy in the post-1929 Europe. It is not coincidental that *Duce's* first pronouncement of the universality of Fascism came only weeks after the electoral triumph of the NSDAP in the elections of September 1930. The emergence of a powerful ultranationalist party in a country with the greatest thirst and potential for territorial revisionism against the Versailles settlement created both an opportunity and a challenge for the Italian Fascist regime. On the one hand, it could put Germany on the track of a more ambitious revisionist foreign policy at the expense of the British-French vision of security in the European system, expressed in the Peace Treaties of 1919-20. This was a highly desirable prospect for Italian expansionism in the Mediterranean, since it could induce the British and French governments into making territorial concessions in exchange for Italy's support for order in Europe. On the other hand, the possibility of a nationalist regime in Germany posed certain logistical problems for Mussolini's territorial aspirations¹⁶. If Germany's revisionist aspirations in the west served Italy's plans to press France into colonial concessions in the Mediterranean, Hitler's irredentist declarations meant that the two countries would clash on the issue of Austria and South Tyrol¹⁷.

Mussolini's hopes and fears were all confirmed after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933. Despite the lack of major foreign policy initiatives during the first fifteen months of the Nazi regime, the emergence of a nationalist Germany revived the debate among the European powers about the need to reassess aspects of the territorial, economic and military postwar arrangement. At the same time, Hitler's Germany appeared as a potential second pole - and revisionist *par excellence* - in the European state system. This could enable Italy to play a crucial diplomatic role by capitalising on her privileged diplomatic position as guarantor of European security under the Locarno pacts, but also ideologically associated with its main challenger. In this vein, Mussolini achieved the signing of the Four Power Pact

¹⁶ For such an analysis see Kirkpatrick, I. S., *Mussolini. Study of a Demagogue* (London 1964), pp. 288-9

¹⁷ Aloisi, P. *Journal 25 Juin-14 Juillet 1936* (Paris 1957), 14-1-1933; Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 45-6

in July 1933¹⁸, a treaty which emphasised Italy's new-found diplomatic confidence as the "determinant weight" of the European balance of power¹⁹. By pursuing his famous policy of "equidistance" towards Britain/France and Germany, he could play the one side against the other, using the former against the latter in central Europe and doing the reverse in the Rhine region.

However, there were ominous signs from the outset. Germany's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference was the first indication of the problems involved in the policy of incorporating Nazi Germany into the European security system. The German decision caused considerable vexation to the Italian leader, as it was interpreted as a blow to the Four-Power Pact²⁰. The aggressive policy of the Nazi regime towards Austria, however, was not just a diplomatic problem for the Italian regime. Since it cast a serious shadow over the security of the Brenner, it impinged upon the issue of Italy's territorial integrity. Understandably, all postwar Italian governments had been extremely sensitive about the symbolic importance of the Brenner as the only reward for Italy's participation in the First World War, and Mussolini was not in the slightest prepared to jeopardise his nationalist credentials by making any concessions on this issue. Furthermore, the reactivation of German revisionism in central Europe posed an even more comprehensive threat to Italy's diplomatic position in the European system. By becoming the champion of the anti-Versailles revisionism the Nazi regime could question Italy's special relations with the revisionist bloc (i.e. Hungary) and remove those countries from the Italian sphere of influence. Such a development could restrict Mussolini's diplomatic flexibility and relegate the international image of Italian Fascism to a secondary position in favour of a potentially powerful and successful German version.

¹⁸ For the importance of, and the political calculations behind, the Four Power Pact see Knox, "Conquest", p. 315; Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, pp. 49-51; Petersen, *Hitler und Mussolini*, pp. 137-185; Albrecht-Carrié, R., *Italy from Napoleon to Mussolini* (New York 1950), pp. 202ff

¹⁹ De Felice, R., "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in De Felice (ed.), *L'Italia fra tedeschi e alleati*, pp. 57-74; DDI, 7th, IX, 234

²⁰ This event is discussed, from the Italian perspective, in Lowe, C. J., Marzari, F., *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London & Boston 1975), pp. 227f; Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, p. 59. For Mussolini's vexation at the German decision to withdraw from the Conference, see DGFP, C, 2, 4 and 18. Note, however, the support of the Italian regime against the League of Nations [C, 2, 178], and Italy's counterproposals [C, 1, 431/494]

In this sense, from the beginning of 1933 the two fascist regimes were in an ambiguous political relationship. Hitler's rise to power was seen by Mussolini as a further triumph of the anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-socialist struggle that his regime had initiated in 1922. Moreover, the new German Chancellor never concealed his admiration for the *Duce* and the influence that his political techniques had exerted on the Nazi movement²¹. Mussolini, however, quickly realised that the success of the Hitler experiment in Germany included beneficial elements for the future of European fascism, but was also a potential threat to the co-operation between the two countries. In the framework of the German nationalist ideology, the irredentist claim for the unification of all German-speaking populations in central Europe possessed a similar symbolic significance to postwar Italy's obsession with the Brenner²². The 1920 Programme of the NSDAP expressly stated that "we do not abandon any German in Sudetenland, in South Tyrol, in Poland, in ... Austria". This was, however, exactly the problem - that the *alldeutsche* aspirations of the Nazi regime involved not only the *Anschluss* question or the Polish Corridor, but also the future of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol (Alto Adige). Having been incorporated into the Italian national territory in 1919 and undergoing a continuous policy of Italianisation, the German-speaking population of South Tyrol saw in Hitler's rise to power an excellent opportunity for their reunion with the German *Vaterland*. Of course, Hitler himself had since 1922 plainly declared that "for us the question of South Tyrol does not exist, nor will it ever exist"²³. Both before and after 1933 he reiterated many times his basic thesis that "the fate of some thousands of erstwhile Austrian citizens should not influence the relations between the two states"²⁴. There was, however, a

²¹ For Mussolini's comments see DGFP, C, 1, 12; DDI, 7th, VIII, 182. For Hitler's admiration for Mussolini see Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, p. 45; Knox, M., "Conquest, Domestic and Foreign, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), pp. 23-5; Pese, W. W., "Hitler und Italien, 1920-1928", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (1955), pp. 113-26

²² In Feder, G., *Das Program der NSDAP und seine weltanschaulichen Grundlagen* (Munich 1932), pp. 19-22. Cf. Ritschel, K. H., *Diplomatie um Südtirol. Politische Hintergründe eines europäischen Vorsagens* (Stuttgart 1966), pp. 133f

²³ DDI, 7th, I, 131; Schubert, pp. 76-81

²⁴ Hitler, A., *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen*, edited by Jäckel, E., Kuhn, A. (Stuttgart 1980), pp. 727-8 (speech to party members in Munich, 14 November 1922); De Felice, *I rapporti tra fascismo e nazionalsocialismo fino all'andata al potere di Hitler 1922-1933. Appunti e documenti* (Naples 1971), p. 206f. In general, for Hitler's efforts to allay Italian fears about German plans for South Tyrol see Petersen, J., *Hitler und Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933-1936* (Tübingen 1973), pp. 65-8; and, in this study, Ch. 4, Section III

crucial discrepancy in the geopolitical perspectives of the two regimes with reference to the Danubian area. For Hitler, the South Tyrol issue could be separated from the fate of Austria. He was, therefore, ready to sacrifice his irredentist credibility by offering a guarantee for the Brenner frontier in exchange for Italy's support on the question of *Anschluss*²⁵. For Mussolini, however, this separation was as yet inconceivable, both for strategic (an independent Austria was the perfect buffer state between Germany and Italy) and prestige reasons²⁶. While he offered his diplomatic support to the Dollfuss regime so as to draw Austria closer to the Italian sphere of influence²⁷, Hitler never ceased to subvert the country's internal stability, aiming at her future peaceful absorption in the German Reich.

The meeting of the two fascist leaders in June 1934 and the subsequent abortive coup in Vienna exposed the problems of the German-Italian diplomatic relations²⁸. This indication of Hitler's expansionist aspirations seriously alarmed Mussolini and cast a shadow on the co-operation between the two regimes that was to last until 1936. Hitler became disillusioned about the prospect of an alliance with Italy, but was determined to continue his efforts to build a basis of understanding between the two regimes²⁹. Mussolini, on the other hand, strengthened his support for the independence of the Austrian government, reverted to the policy of equidistance and attempted to re-establish his relations with the west, despite long-standing

²⁵ Lowe, Marzari, p. 231. In May 1933 he even proposed a plan for the "fusion" of Austria (which removed the negative implications of the word *Anschluss*) in return for promises of Italian territorial compensation elsewhere [DGFP, C, 1, 262], in the not-so-near future [C, 1, 191]. See also Weinberg, G. L. (ed.), *Hitlers zweites Buch: Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (Stuttgart 1961), pp. 208ff

²⁶ Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 46-7; DGFP, C, 3, 7

²⁷ Lowe, Marzari, p. 232-6; Heineman, J. L., *Hitler's First Foreign Minister. Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1979), pp. 103-9; Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome 1980), pp. 68-79

²⁸ For these two developments see, among others, Petersen, *Hitler und Mussolini*, pp. 344ff; Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936* (Chicago 1970), pp. 87-107; DGFP, C, 3, 5/119/143; Quartararo, pp. 80f; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 181-5

²⁹ See, however, the negative attitude of Neurath towards Papen's suggestions and attempts to make dramatic overtures to Italy in order to restore a good diplomatic climate in the German-Italian relations in DGFP, C, III, 566, fn. 7. Neurath, also, never endorsed the opinion of the German Ambassador in Rome, von Hassell, who sent numerous proposals and memoranda about the need for good German-Italian relations to the Wilhelmstrasse (DGFP, C, 2, 28/67; 4, 61)

disagreements on the colonial issue³⁰. The events of the summer of 1934, however, produced a positive development for the stability of the European system. Due to their mutual distrust and antagonism, the two fascist regimes became more interested in stabilising their positions rather than engaging in further expansionist plans³¹. Hitler's determination to bring Britain and Italy closer to Germany achieved equal priority with rearmament and economic preparation³², and dictated moderation in the conduct of foreign affairs in order not to further alienate his two potential allies³³. At the same time, Mussolini's plans for a colonial campaign against Ethiopia³⁴ had to be postponed, since the situation in Europe demanded vigilance and readiness.

This was the first evidence that the incompatibility between the revisionist-expansionist objectives of the two regimes could act as a restraint upon each regime's propensity for aggression. In the period up to the Ethiopian war the antagonism intensified, reaching a climax at the beginning of 1935. The reintroduction of conscription in the *Reichswehr*, in violation of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty, prompted Italy to join Britain and France at the Stresa Conference in an effort to isolate Germany and discourage future challenges to the European status quo. The same logic was behind the Italian proposal for an Austro-Hungarian pact³⁵. The anti-German shift of the Italian foreign policy had become manifest in the Mussolini-Laval pact of January 1935³⁶, but was further consolidated at Stresa by

³⁰ For Mussolini's support for Austria see Petersen, *Hitler und Mussolini*, Ch. 5; for his relations with the West, Quartararo, pp. 82ff. Note that the Italian government did not issue a *demarché* for the events of July 1934 [DGFP, C, 3, 127]

³¹ The disillusionment of both sides is evident in DGFP, C, 1, 485; C, 3, 152/ 266/303/376; C, 4, 61. See also C, 3, pp. 329-30

³² For the concept of a "German-British-Italian" alliance in Hitler's thought see Petersen, *Hitler und Mussolini*, pp. 60-1. See also Domarus, M., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945* (Würzburg 1962), pp. 33ff, 434; Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf* (London 1972, trans. by Ralph Mannheim), pp. 554-85; Weinberg, *Hitlers Zweites Buch*, pp. 217f; Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 245-6; *ibid.*, "Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 167ff

³³ See the determination of the German government to postpone or call off any forceful activity regarding the Austria issue, in DGFP, C, 3, 125/135/161/173/179/424/435

³⁴ For the origins of the plans for a campaign against Ethiopia see Robertson, *Empire-BUILDER*, Chs. 1-4; Knox, "Politica estera italiana", p. 301

³⁵ For the Stresa front see Quartararo, pp. 118-29; and, in this study, Chs. 3-4. For the Austro-Hungarian pact see DGFP, C, 3, 320

³⁶ On the Mussolini-Laval pact of January 1935 see Laurens, F. D., *France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936* (The Hague 1967); Braddick, H., "The Hoare-Laval Plan: A Study in International

what Mussolini interpreted as a “free hand” for expansion in E. Africa conceded by France and, to a degree, by Britain³⁷. However, the visit of Simon in Berlin, and the subsequent talks with Hitler, angered the *Duce*, who feared a British-German rapprochement over the colonial issue in Africa³⁸. Evidently, the Italian Fascist leader intended to use his long-prepared campaign against Ethiopia as a further means of solidifying his diplomatic position towards Germany and of dissuading the Nazi leadership from following an aggressive policy in central Europe³⁹. Abandoning the traditional line of Italian foreign policy (security in Europe as prerequisite for colonial expansion⁴⁰), he aimed to use a military victory in Africa as a reminder of Italy’s power in the European system. It was a risk, but a risk which seemed worth taking under the impression that it would be tolerated by France and Britain.

Carving up “international fascism”: Ethiopia and Rhineland

The reality was quite different. Mussolini’s impression about the “free hand” was another manifestation of his penchant for misunderstanding situations: it was Britain and France who opposed the campaign, and Germany who gradually developed a positive attitude towards it⁴¹. With his Ethiopian war Mussolini dealt a double blow to the stability of the European system. First, he was the first to violate one of the two principal dogmas on which the postwar settlement rested: he turned his back to peaceful diplomacy and used violence to achieve his colonial aspirations. Second, by alienating Italy from the other guarantors of European security (Britain, France) he enabled Germany to play the role of the ally and supporter against the punitive attitude of the west (e.g. against the imposition of sanctions through the

Politics”, *Review of Politics*, 24 (1962), pp. 69-78; Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, pp. 114ff. On the origins of an Italian plan for an anti-German alliance see Aloisi, 13/17.4.1933

³⁷ Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, Ch. 10. Quartararo (pp. 85ff) notes, however, that there was little actual discussion about Ethiopia in Stresa. See also the reassurances that Britain would not use violence in Knox, “Politica estera italiana”, p. 323

³⁸ Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, pp. 126-7; Aloisi, 27.3.1935

³⁹ Cerruti, V., “Perchè Hitler aiuto il Negus”, *Il Tempo*, 20-4-1959, quoted in Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, p. 112; Knox, “Politica estera italiana”, pp. 320-1; DDI, 7th, X, 413/423

⁴⁰ Rochat, G., *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d’Etiopia* (Milan 1971), pp. 276ff; Robertson, *Empire-Builder*, p. 69

⁴¹ On the declaration of German benevolent neutrality see DGFP, C, 3, 557; Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945. A Documentary Reader*, vol. III: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (Exeter 1988), pp. 667-9

League of Nations). Diplomatic isolation, and a shared feeling of injustice brought the two fascist regimes for the first time to the same camp. In the meantime, Nazi leadership, taking advantage of the confusion that the Ethiopian war had caused to the European system, scrapped the last remaining restriction in the Versailles Treaty by re-militarising the Rhineland. This was a move designed to provoke the western powers, since Italy was neither against the German aspirations in the Rhine nor in a position to effectively react while engaged in war in Africa⁴². Mussolini not only encouraged Hitler when he was informed of the plans for the campaign but he also hastened to declare the Stresa front “dead” in the aftermath of the crisis⁴³.

It is tempting to see the period of the Ethiopian war and the operation in the Rhineland as a turning point in the relations between the two fascist regimes and the establishment of fascism as an international force⁴⁴. Undoubtedly, Germany's refusal to join the League of Nations in the imposition of the embargo on Italy was a crucial factor in the subsequent Italian-German diplomatic rapprochement⁴⁵. This was further facilitated by the refusal of the Italian government to impose sanctions on Germany for breaching the Locarno Treaty after the remilitarisation of the Rhineland⁴⁶. Moreover, Hitler's decision to abandon neutrality and initiate limited exports of military materiel, raw materials and foodstuff to Italy in November 1935 weighed decisively in Mussolini's change of direction on the Austrian issue two months later⁴⁷. His declaration in favour of an Austrian-German pact which would render Austria a “German satellite” was welcomed by the German leadership, despite the

⁴² Craig, G. A., *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford 1978), pp. 688-91; and Michalka (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I, pp. 224-5. For the French reaction to the German move see Parker, R. A. C., “The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936”, *World Politics*, 3 (1951), pp. 353-73

⁴³ See DGFP, C, 4, 579; and DGFP, C, 4, 414/525/579, DDI, 8th, III, 241 respectively

⁴⁴ Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, p. 70; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il Duce*, vol. II: *Lo Stato Totalitario 1936-1939* (Turin 1981), Ch. 3

⁴⁵ Grandi, D., *Il mio paese. Ricordi autobiografici*, ed. by Renzo De Felice (Bologna 1985), pp. 401-2

⁴⁶ See the relevant reference in Mussolini's article in *Popolo d'Italia*, 2-11-1936, reprinted and translated by Delzell, C. F. (ed.), *Mediterranean Fascism 1919-1945* (New York & Evanston 1970), pp. 201-2; DDI, 8th, V, 67; Domarus, M., *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 215-8; Robertson, E. M., “Hitler and Sanctions. Mussolini and the Rhineland”, *European Studies Review*, 7 (1977), pp. 409-35; and Domarus, *Hitler*, I, p. 812. On Italy's refusal to impose sanctions see DGFP, C, 4, 579; DDI, 8th, III, 434/445

⁴⁷ This “neutrality” had been the outcome of Neurath's suspicious attitude towards Italy and of the suggestions of the German Ambassador in Rome von Hassell (DGFP, C, 4, 167). On the declaration of neutrality see also Petersen, p. 389. On exports of raw materials to Italy, in spite of the sanctions, see DGFP, C, 4, 372 and 485

tensions that it generated between the *Duce* and his anti-German Under-secretary to the Foreign Ministry, Suvich⁴⁸.

There are, however, strong arguments against treating the Ethiopian war as an actual turning point. The extent of Hitler's assistance to Italy during the campaign should not be exaggerated. On the military level, it has now been established that Germany had helped Ethiopia to rearm prior to the outbreak of hostilities, in order to make sure that the country could fight against Italy⁴⁹. Hitler wished to avoid two extreme outcomes: defeat for Italy (which would shatter the prestige of European fascism in general) or a quick victory (which would enable Italy to use her newly-acquired prestige *against* Germany)⁵⁰. The prolongation of the campaign enabled him to capitalise on his "good services" to Italy, and to bring Italy closer to Germany by taking advantage of deteriorating Italo-British relations⁵¹. Additionally, during the conflict he could promote his immediate rearmament and revisionist plans without significant reaction from the European powers. On the political level, Hitler was willing to help his "ideological" ally but not to the point of jeopardising his recent achievements in the German-British relations. In spite of his long-standing plans for an alliance between the two fascist countries and Britain, the signing of the Naval Pact with the latter in the summer of 1935 elevated the importance of Britain in his political calculations⁵². Therefore, faced with a possible dilemma to choose Britain *or* Italy (due to the clash between the two countries during the Ethiopian campaign), he would still opt for the former⁵³.

⁴⁸ For Mussolini's declaration of January 1936 see DGFP, C, 4, 485. For Suvich's disagreements with this pro-German shift in the Italian foreign policy see De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, Vol. I: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1974), pp. 732-4; Quartararo, p. 271; DDI, 8th, III, 194/417/533; Knox, "Politica estera italiana", p. 317

⁴⁹ Robertson, *Empire-BUILDER*, pp. 111, 127, 152-3; DGFP, C, 4, 83/212; C, 3, 557/558

⁵⁰ On Hitler's desire to see Italy engaged in a victorious, yet long, campaign in Ethiopia see Funke, *Sanktionen und Kanonen*, pp. 84ff, 181ff; DGFP, C, 4, 360

⁵¹ Funke, *Sanktionen und Kanonen*, p. 60, 102ff

⁵² On the implications of the Naval Treaty for German foreign policy see Ingram, R., *Hitlers glücklichster Tag - London am 18. Juni 1935* (Stuttgart 1962); and Watt, D. C., "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. An Interim Judgment", *Journal of Modern History*, 28 (1956), pp. 155-75. For the complete text of the pact see DGFP, C, 4, pp. 319-26. A different interpretation, dismissing that Hitler really intended an alliance with Britain, is offered in Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 85-6

⁵³ Quoted in Irving, D., *The War Path. Hitler's Germany 1933-1939* (London 1978), p. 47. See also Hildebrand, K., *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NSDAP und die koloniale Frage 1919-1945*

The international “crusade” of fascism: the Spanish civil war

Undoubtedly, the eventual success of Italy in Ethiopia and of Germany in the Rhine prepared the ground for the change in the European balance of power which was to become evident in the 1936-8 period. Victory brought confidence to the two fascist regimes and introduced a dynamism in the conduct of their foreign affairs. At the same time, the consolidation of the British-French bloc prompted the two fascist regimes to join forces for the first time, even on a limited and opportunistic basis⁵⁴. This was still, however, a reaction to the opposition of the western powers, lacking the characteristics of a positive fascist alliance⁵⁵. It was the Spanish civil war which transformed the Italian-German relations and offered fascism the first chance for universality. This development did not become immediately evident, as the two fascist regimes decided to intervene on General Franco’s side for quite different reasons and in different ways. After an initial period of hesitation, Mussolini committed a large, if ill-equipped and ill-trained, part of his armed forces to the struggle against the Republican government⁵⁶. The main reason behind this transformation was the widespread belief among the Fascist leadership that the Nationalists would overrun the Republican forces within weeks. Mussolini intended

(Munich 1969), pp. 497ff. Cf., however, Weinberg’s suspicion about Hitler’s genuine intentions for a long-term rapprochement with Britain [Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 85ff]

⁵⁴ Elements of an Italian shift towards an anti-British and anti-French policy may be traced in Mussolini’s remark late in 1935, that “the decrepit powers search to bloc the *young* nations in their search for space” [DGFP, C, 4, 322 -emphasis added]. See also Petersen, *Hitler und Mussolini*, pp. 483-6. The “young nations” theme became a catchword of the Italian-German co-operation after 1936 [for example, Domarus, *Hitler*, I, pp. 858, 860; II, 1522]. See also Santarelli, E. (ed.), *Scritti politici di Benito Mussolini* (Milan 1979), pp. 297ff; Simonini, A., *Il linguaggio di Mussolini* (Milan 1978), pp. 146-7

⁵⁵ See the scepticism on both sides that the Axis might have been a step “too far” [DGFP, C, 5, 89; C, 6, 312; DDI, 8th, IV, 186]. Note also the Italian reassurances to the French government about the nature of the Italian-German rapprochement [DDI, 8th, IV, 109, 205]; and the German irritation at the British-Italian agreement [DGFP, D, 1, 784]

⁵⁶ For Mussolini’s initial hesitation see DDI, 8th, IV, 583 (21 July 1936); V, 501 (Franco’s pressure for help, 23 September 1936). On the reaction of Italian military officials see Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 18, 25. On the extent of Italy’s military commitment in Spain see DGFP, D, 3,

to use his army in a relatively safe and brief operation, in order to further enhance his diplomatic prestige, acquire part of Spain's raw materials, and establish Italy as the major power in the Mediterranean. He was also interested in preventing the consolidation of another Popular Front government (after France) in western Mediterranean, or even a successful revolution of the left in Spain⁵⁷. There was, however, a further long-term geopolitical consideration that dramatically increased the importance of the Spanish civil war for Mussolini's expansionist aspirations: Gibraltar. The Italian leader had long ago emphasised that the Italian vision of a *mare nostrum* in the Mediterranean presupposed effective control of its two strategic exits (Suez Canal and Gibraltar)⁵⁸. Since a direct conflict with Britain was both unfeasible and undesirable, Mussolini decided to aid Franco hoping that a future nationalist Spain would co-operate with Italy against Britain's domination of the Mediterranean⁵⁹. In the context of this strategy, Mussolini did not conceal his territorial ambitions for the Balearic Islands as a further step in consolidating his position in W. Mediterranean⁶⁰. In this sense, Italy's extensive engagement in the Spanish civil war originated not so much from the idea of a "crusade" against Bolshevism (as the regime later claimed), but from the anti-British Mediterranean strategy of the Italian regime and fear of losing control of a vital part of the Mediterranean.

For his part, Hitler did not hesitate much in sending the first German troops in the summer of 1936. In his Second Book he had established Spain as a possible ally in his anti-French strategy⁶¹, but had seen his plans fail after the rise of left-wing governments in both Spain (1933) and France (1936). Now, Franco's revolt offered an opportunity to reverse the situation. A nationalist government in Spain would put

18/130/199, and 156, where the Italian side presses the German government for acceleration of military aid but meets von Neurath's cautious attitude.

⁵⁷ Coverdale, J. F., *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton, NJ 1975), pp. 7-15, 388ff; Pastorelli, P., "La politica estera fascista dalla fine del conflitto etiopico alla seconda guerra mondiale", in de Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 105-6

⁵⁸ Bernardi, G., *Il disarmo navale fra le due guerre mondiali 1919-1939* (Rome 1975), p. 46; Knox, "Politica estera italiana", pp. 296-7; OO, XVI, 106, 128, 159, 301; XVIII, 459; LX, 51-2

⁵⁹ DGFP, D, 3, 130

⁶⁰ Pastorelli, P., "La politica estera fascista", p. 105. Cf. DDI, 8th, V, 152, where the Nationalist side denies allegations about the cession of the Balearic Islands to "any foreign power".

⁶¹ Weinberg (ed.), *Hitlers Zweites Buch*, pp. 140, 167, 217

considerable pressure on the Popular Front in Paris, and even facilitate a military campaign against France sometime in the future. Furthermore, Germany's precarious economic situation in the summer of 1936 made the question of raw materials even more important for German rearmament⁶². Göring's plans for the shipment of copper, tungsten and ore from Spain played a significant role in Hitler's decision to intervene⁶³. As in the case of Mussolini, however, it was the anticipation of a swift victory by Franco's forces which gave the final impetus to Germany's involvement in Spain⁶⁴. The overestimation of the Nationalists' fighting power created the impression to the Nazi leadership that they could obtain raw materials, test their new weapons, and achieve a diplomatic victory with minimum risk⁶⁵. There is nothing to suggest that either of the two fascist leaders initially sought co-ordination in their military involvement, or that the Italo-German rivalry for the title of the fascist Mecca had in any way diminished. Despite the rapprochement during the Ethiopian war, the geopolitical differences of the two countries remained unresolved, and their separate interference in the Spanish civil war increased mutual suspicion and antagonism. Undoubtedly, Hitler wished to avoid further deterioration in the Italo-German relations at any cost, and this explains why he sent Prince of Hessen and von Canaris to Italy in order to reassure the *Duce* about Germany's limited involvement and objectives in Spain⁶⁶. The plans, however, for military co-ordination were deferred⁶⁷.

⁶² On the 1936 economic crisis see Hiden, J., Farquharson, J., *Explaining Hitler's Germany* (Totowa, New Jersey 1983), pp. 143ff; Mason, T., "The Primacy of Politics - Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany", in Woolf, S. J. (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1968), pp. 178ff; Carr, W., *Arms, Autarky and Aggression. A Study in German Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (London 1972), pp. 46-65

⁶³ DGFP, D, 3, 603/702, Over, R. J., *Göring: The 'Iron Man'* (London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley 1984), pp. 44-5; note, however, the problems in eliciting the materials: 463/469/470/529

⁶⁴ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 291-2. Note, however, that although Hitler was prepared for a short war in Spain, he did not wish an extremely quick victory for Franco. The civil war kept Italy busy in the Mediterranean and halted the Italian plans for further expansion in Africa or in Central Europe [Craig, *Germany*, pp. 695]

⁶⁵ Irving, p. 51; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 693f, and *ibid.*, "The German Foreign Office from Neurath to Ribbentrop", in Gilbert, F., Craig, G. A. (eds.), *The Diplomats* (Princeton, New Jersey 1953), pp. 428f

⁶⁶ Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, p. 292; Ciano, G., *Europa verso il catastrofe* (Milan 1948), pp. 87-99; DGFP, D, 3, 495

⁶⁷ Heineman mentions that Hitler asked Neurath to fly to Italy in order to co-ordinate the joint fascist military intervention in Spain, but the Foreign Minister refused (p. 150, n. 5)

The situation started to change in the autumn of 1936. The decision of the British and French governments to abstain from involvement in the Spanish crisis ("non-intervention") offered the Republican government the justification to turn to Stalin for the much needed military aid against Franco⁶⁸. The involvement of the Soviet Union in Spain coincided with the first indications that the conflict would not be as brief or pre-determined as Mussolini and Hitler had anticipated⁶⁹. These two elements invested the civil war with an international significance which involved the two major conquering creeds of the twentieth century⁷⁰. As Franco's victory seemed far from certain in 1936-7, the "export" of Bolshevism in Spain and the prospect of a humiliating defeat of fascism by communism placed the issue of the Italo-German co-operation in a totally new light. Despite Neurath's cool attitude towards an alliance with Italy⁷¹, Ciano's successful visit to Germany in October 1936 paved the way for the first official declaration of fascism's international dimension: the Axis⁷². Ironically, it was Mussolini who announced in Milan that "this vertical line between Rome and Berlin is not a partition, but rather an axis"⁷³, and he reiterated his new-found confidence in the Italo-German relations many times thereafter. The anathema of "anti-Bolshevism" served as a pretext for fascist intervention in Spain, and co-operation between the two fascist regimes was provided with the element of an ideological crusade that it initially lacked⁷⁴. This new element transformed their involvement in a symbolic struggle for the prestige of fascism in general. The first fruits of this new rapprochement were an agreement between von Neurath and Ciano for military co-ordination of the two countries' armed forces in Spain, and the joint

⁶⁸ DGFP, D, 3, 100/117; DDI, 8th, V, 259

⁶⁹ DGFP, D, 3, 502; DDI, 8th, V, 491

⁷⁰ On the "moral significance" of the Spanish civil war for the fascist leaderships, see DDI, 8th, IV, 627; V, 264/273; Domarus, *Hitler*, I, p.646

⁷¹ See Neurath's cautious comments on Ciano's proposal for an alliance and the resolution of the long-standing Italo-German difference in Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 336-7. See also DGFP, C, 5, 554

⁷² Ciano, G., *Diplomatic Papers* (London 1948), pp. 52-61; DGFP, C, 5, 618/622/624 (conversations with Neurath, Goering and Hitler respectively, 21-24 October 1936)

⁷³ The text of the speech is reprinted in Mussolini, B., *Scritti e discorsi*, X, pp. 201ff. For the repercussions of the speech see DDI, 8th, V, 329-333/339/342/346

⁷⁴ Craig, *Germany*, pp. 693-6. See also Mussolini's relevant references in his interview to the *Völkischer Beobachter* (18-1-1937), reprinted in Italian in Mussolini, B., *Scritti e Discorsi*, vol. XI (Milan 1938), pp. 43-5

decision to recognise the Burgos government⁷⁵. As, however, the prospect of victory was becoming more and more distant in the first half of 1937, the national interests which initially prompted Mussolini and Hitler to intervene were somewhat overshadowed by the common concern for a prestige victory against Bolshevism at any cost⁷⁶.

Antagonism, of course, did not fade away. Both Italy and Germany gradually increased their military commitment to the civil war, and this enabled General Franco to play the one against the other in order to elicit more aid⁷⁷. At the same time, after the defeat of the Italian troops at Guadalajara and the parallel successes of the German units, Mussolini felt impelled to restore the honour of his armed forces and defend their efficiency against Spanish and German criticisms⁷⁸. The implicit competition between Italy and Germany increasingly became a battle for prestige. Mussolini kept pressing Franco for a commanding role for the Italian forces in the conduct of war, while showing great alarm at the British-German contacts, and struggling to obtain more economic concessions from Franco at the expense of his Axis ally⁷⁹. Especially towards the end of the war, when the outcome of the civil war had been determined in favour of the Nationalists, the military activity of the Italian air force (the fierce raids over Spanish cities) seemed to have little relevance to the needs of the situation. It demonstrated, however, the growing pressure on Mussolini's regime to re-establish its diplomatic and military significance vis-à-vis the Nazi challenge⁸⁰. This was the first example of a radicalisation which was not the direct outcome of either ideological commitments or diplomatic initiative; the first in a long list of similar developments in the period between the Spanish civil war and the outbreak of war in September 1939. The need for prestige, which was the logical product of the "great power" ideology, committed Mussolini to a dynamic course of

⁷⁵ On the military agreement, see Weinberg, *Diplomatic Revolution*, pp. 294-5; DDI, 8th, V, 256. On the issue of declaration of the Burgos government, see DGFP, D, 3, 110/121/123; DDI, 8th, V, 133/180/280/375/476

⁷⁶ See Mussolini's passionate anti-Bolshevik speech in Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 206-7 (12 May 1938)

⁷⁷ See, for example, DGFP, D, 3, 363

⁷⁸ On the negative impact of the Guadalajara incident on the Italian leadership, see DGFP, D, 3, 230/236; *Ciano's Diaries, 1937-1938*, 20.12.1937

⁷⁹ DGFP, D, 3, 654; 318/328/403; 786, respectively

⁸⁰ *Ciano's Diary, 1937-1938*, 23.12.1937

action disproportionate to Italy's geopolitical interests, and beyond the capabilities of the country's domestic system.

In this sense, the Spanish civil war *is* a real turning point in the radicalisation of fascist expansionist policies. The German successes in Spain were seen as the first tangible evidence of the country's dramatic military and diplomatic recovery from the limitations imposed upon her by the Versailles arrangement. The image of a powerful Nazi Germany, technologically advanced and domestically monolithic, crucially contributed to the transformation of the European balance of power in the 1937-9 period. After a long period in which fascism was indisputably an Italian innovation, Germany emerged as the unquestionable heir apparent. The direction of new fascist ideas and techniques was reversed: up to 1936 Italy had been the "exporter" and Nazi Germany the beneficiary⁸¹; now the evolution of fascism was becoming a German responsibility. This does not imply that Mussolini was forced by the Nazi dynamism to relinquish his autonomy in the shaping of the Italian expansionist objectives, as E. Wiskemann and D. Mack Smith have argued⁸². The revisionist initiative, however, eluded the Italian regime and, even worse for the *Duce*, this seemed an irreversible process. The Nazi leadership, strengthened from the German successes in Spain and freed from the postwar military restrictions, was now in a position to *dictate* the terms of the European diplomatic game.

Furthermore, the fascist military involvement in Spain produced a completely different verdict on the two fascist regimes. German weapons and air-force were utterly successful in military terms, while the performance of the Italian armed forces encouraged scepticism among the country's political and military circles about the degree of their readiness for a European conflict⁸³. The difference was that, in

⁸¹ Carr, W., *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics* (London 1978), pp. 23ff

⁸² Mack Smith, D., *Italy. A Modern History* (Ann Arbor 1969), esp. pp. 454ff; Wiskemann, *Fascism in Italy*, Ch. 5. For a criticism of this interpretation see Alatri, P., *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome 1963), pp. 27ff; Petersen, J., "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 45-6

⁸³ Minniti, F., "Aspetti della politica fascista degli armamenti dal 1935 al 1943", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 127-36, and "Il problema degli armamenti nella preparazione militare italiana dal 1935 al 1943", *Storia Contemporanea*, 2 (1978), pp. 1-56; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 28-9. For the problems of the whole industrial infrastructure in Italy see Whittam, J., "The Italian General Staff and the Coming of the Second World War", in Preston, A. (ed.), *General Staffs and Diplomacy Before the Second World War* (Totowa, New Jersey 1978), pp. 91-4; Kennedy, P., *The Rise and*

Germany's case, success in Spain belied the initial hesitations of the Foreign Office and of the *Reichswehr* about the level of the armed forces' readiness. The cumulative outcome was that these parallel successes in the domestic and international arena for the Nazi leadership intensified a propensity (ideological *and* political) for further, and more extensive expansion. By contrast, the Italian regime woke to the realisation that its armed forces were not in a position to contest militarily either the British domination in the Mediterranean or the German dynamism in central Europe. This was an uncomfortable admission at a period when the antagonism for the leadership of international fascism with Germany was escalating.

Mussolini, however, did not give up. In the period up to the summer of 1939 he followed a double strategy to offset the disadvantages of Italy's military weakness. On the one hand, building on the tradition of "determinant weight", he endeavoured to use diplomacy in order to contain German expansionism without either jeopardising his newly established alliance with Hitler or risking a confrontation with the British-French bloc⁸⁴. On the other hand, he did his best to conceal his inferior position by struggling to keep up with German expansionist policies. With this strategy he intended to restore his country's prestige, to avoid a capitulation to the inflated Nazi expansionist aspirations, and to gain time in preparing for war. The problem was that these three goals proved to be either incompatible with each other or not within the control of the Italian leadership. Since the initiative had been usurped by a Germany determined to expand, and Mussolini's efforts to check German aggression had limited success, the Italian leadership was forced to conduct its foreign policy on a short-term basis, largely defined by German actions. Time was evidently running out, resources were limited, and co-ordination between military, economic and political circles was poor. Prestige, however, dictated a response to equal Nazi Germany in expansion and in "fascist" dynamism.

The German success in the Rhineland and the impressive military showing of her armed forces in Spain had an immense psychological impact upon Mussolini

Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (London 1989), pp. 379ff.

⁸⁴ The attempt of the Italian leadership to keep all options open towards both Germany and Britain-France is evident in the reassurances to both sides [DGFP, D, 1, 224/755/769/784]. For this interpretation see De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. I: *Lo Stato Totalitario, 1936-1940* (Turin 1981), pp. 466ff

personally. The latent admiration of the *Duce* for the achievements of his German counterpart was further fostered during his visit to Germany in September 1937⁸⁵. Officially, he could now speak of a “community not only of ideas, but also of action”, of “many common elements in the [two regimes’] worldviews”, and of a “common destiny”⁸⁶. In private, however, he was becoming fascinated by the power and dynamism that the Nazi regime had achieved in Germany within such a short time. He and his new Foreign Minister, Ciano, promoted the Axis project after 1935 with an enthusiasm that found little response amongst the most prominent Fascist figures. Only R. Farinacci and G. Preziosi had been traditional supporters and admirers of Germany, both as a cultural entity and as Nazi system⁸⁷. By contrast, C. Malaparte had been adamant in his rejection of Nazism since the early 1930s. In 1930 he published the *Technique du coup d'état*, in which he described Hitler as a caricature of Mussolini, a man whose brutality betrayed his ideological weakness and whose party lacked the ideals of dignity, liberty and culture which, according to Malaparte, characterised Italian Fascism⁸⁸. Bottai, on the other hand, did endorse the project of universal fascism but underscored the need to be cautious towards the Nazi regime. He saw the alliance with Nazism as a necessity dictated by the two systems’ common hostility to the democracies but remained sceptical about the ideological affinities between them. After the war, he described the alliance with Germany as an “ideological abdication in the hands of Nazism”, resulting from Mussolini’s obsession with German power and Ciano’s limited ability to appreciate the ideological differences between the two systems⁸⁹. Yet, as he always did, Bottai publicly supported the regime’s policy of rapprochement with Germany until the Grand Council meeting of July 1943. Balbo, on the other hand, was not as diplomatic as his friend and fellow *quadrumvire* Bottai. According to Ciano, he “detested the Germans” and regarded the Axis as a big mistake that might repudiate the autonomy and essence of Fascism. From the columns of his newspaper *Corriere Padano* he

⁸⁵ DGFP, C, 6, 568; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 209-18

⁸⁶ See Mussolini’s speech in Berlin, reprinted in *Popolo d'Italia*, 29-9-1937, excerpts of which can be found in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 737-8. For an English translation of the speech see Delzell, pp. 202-5 (28 September 1937)

⁸⁷ Hamilton, A., *The Appeal of Fascism. A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism 1919-1945* (London 1971), pp. 77-8

⁸⁸ Malaparte, C., *Technique du coup d'état* (Paris 1948), pp. 161-72

launched a bitter anti-German attack in the autumn and winter of 1939, sending an implicit message to his *Capo* which Mussolini did not fail to understand and reject in anger⁹⁰. From 1935 until his death in 1940 Balbo used every opportunity to make his strong objections to the Axis known, using the Grand Council meetings to openly criticise the *Duce* for his handling of foreign affairs and for his exaggeration of the affinities between the two regimes⁹¹.

Mussolini himself felt uneasy sometimes about certain totalitarian aspects of the German regime (especially the anti-Semitic propaganda⁹²), but as a social Darwinist he could not but interpret Germany's political, economic and military power as a sign of superior national qualities. In the same vein, he came to view German expansion as a necessity to be contained rather than opposed⁹³. This was a significant transformation in Mussolini's foreign policy ideas, but at the time it was relevant mainly to the issue of Austria. As already indicated, the first signs of change in Italy's position on the *Anschluss* appeared in 1936 and was the outcome of a political gesture on Italy's part in recognition of Germany's aid during the Ethiopian campaign⁹⁴. The first actual concession on the issue was the German-Austrian Agreement, signed between the German and Austrian governments in July 1936, which Mussolini welcomed as a step towards relieving tension in central Europe⁹⁵. The pact with Yugoslavia in March 1937, and the thoughts about its extension to a Balkan-Danubian treaty with Bulgaria and Rumania or Austria and Hungary, did

⁸⁹ Bottai, G., *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* (Milan 1977), pp. 63ff

⁹⁰ For Mussolini's anger with Balbo see *Ciano's Diaries*, 8.12.1939; and 3.6.1937, for Balbo's initial anti-German comments. See also Segrè, C. G., *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1987), pp. 375ff

⁹¹ For Balbo's comments in the Grand Council see, in this study, Ch. 3, Section IVa

⁹² Michaelis, M., *Mussolini and the Jews. German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945* (Oxford 1978), p. 138; Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini* (London 1981), p. 216; *ibid.*, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1976), pp. 44ff; Vincent, A., *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford 1992), p. 151

⁹³ Lowe, Marzari, p. 305

⁹⁴ The same conclusion lay behind Neurath's negative attitude to Hassell's suggestion that Germany should respond to the Italian overture and foster its ties with the Italian regime. See Heineman, p. 108. See also DGFP, D, 1, 758

⁹⁵ For the agreement see DGFP, D, 1, 152; and for the Italian positive reaction to the agreement, C, 5, p. 755; D, 1, 155. However, Quartararo (pp. 285-6) notes that this endorsement did not signify capitulation to the German plans regarding *Anschluss*. See, for example, Mussolini's reaction to Göring's comments in DGFP, D, 1, 169

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The events between the Hossbach conference (11-1937) and the signing of the Pact of Steel (5-1939) proved how significant the transformation in the Italo-German relations was for the radicalisation of fascist expansionism. In his discussion with the heads of the military, diplomatic and political organisations of his regime Hitler made clear that his foreign policy objectives were an open-ended commitment to expansion in central and eastern Europe for the acquisition of living space⁹⁹. The

⁹⁶ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 292-7; and DGFP, C, 6, 502. On Italy’s imperialist ambitions in the Balkan area see Bianchini, F., “L’idea fascista dell’impero nell’area danubiano-balcanica”, in Di Nolfo, E., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi B. (eds.), *L’Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa 1938-1940* (Milan 1986), pp. 173-86

⁹⁷ DGFP, D, 1, 729; Colarizi, S., *L’opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Rome & Bari 1991), pp. 256-61; Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica*, pp. 94-5; Toscano, M., *Le origini diplomatiche del patto d’acciaio* (Florence 1956), pp. 28-32, 385, 388

⁹⁸ Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 142-6; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 300-1. For the British-Italian Agreement see DGFP, D, 1, 733/739/755. Note also Mussolini’s shift to an “evolutionary policy” in early 1938 (D, 1, 256)

⁹⁹ On the Hossbach Conference see Heineman, pp. 159-63; Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany. Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago & London, 1980), pp. 35-42; Carr, *Hitler*, pp. 75ff; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 698-700. For a different interpretation of the Hossbach Conference see Taylor, A. J. P., *Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 131ff

launched a bitter anti-German attack in the autumn and winter of 1939, sending an implicit message to his *Capo* which Mussolini did not fail to understand and reject in anger⁹⁰. From 1935 until his death in 1940 Balbo used every opportunity to make his strong objections to the Axis known, using the Grand Council meetings to openly criticise the *Duce* for his handling of foreign affairs and for his exaggeration of the affinities between the two regimes⁹¹.

Mussolini himself felt uneasy sometimes about certain totalitarian aspects of the German regime (especially the anti-Semitic propaganda⁹²), but as a social Darwinist he could not but interpret Germany's political, economic and military power as a sign of superior national qualities. In the same vein, he came to view German expansion as a necessity to be contained rather than opposed⁹³. This was a significant transformation in Mussolini's foreign policy ideas, but at the time it was relevant mainly to the issue of Austria. As already indicated, the first signs of change in Italy's position on the *Anschluss* appeared in 1936 and was the outcome of a political gesture on Italy's part in recognition of Germany's aid during the Ethiopian campaign⁹⁴. The first actual concession on the issue was the German-Austrian Agreement, signed between the German and Austrian governments in July 1936, which Mussolini welcomed as a step towards relieving tension in central Europe⁹⁵. The pact with Yugoslavia in March 1937, and the thoughts about its extension to a Balkan-Danubian treaty with Bulgaria and Rumania or Austria and Hungary, did

⁸⁹ Bottai, G., *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* (Milan 1977), pp. 63ff

⁹⁰ For Mussolini's anger with Balbo see *Ciano's Diaries*, 8.12.1939; and 3.6.1937, for Balbo's initial anti-German comments. See also Segrè, C. G., *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1987), pp. 375ff

⁹¹ For Balbo's comments in the Grand Council see, in this study, Ch. 3, Section IVa

⁹² Michaelis, M., *Mussolini and the Jews. German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945* (Oxford 1978), p. 138; Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini* (London 1981), p. 216; *ibid.*, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1976), pp. 44ff; Vincent, A., *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford 1992), p. 151

⁹³ Lowe, Marzari, p. 305

⁹⁴ The same conclusion lay behind Neurath's negative attitude to Hassell's suggestion that Germany should respond to the Italian overture and foster its ties with the Italian regime. See Heineman, p. 108. See also DGFP, D, 1, 758

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⁹⁷ DGFP, D, 1, 729; Colarizi, S., *L’opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Rome & Bari 1991), pp. 256-61; Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica*, pp. 94-5; Toscano, M., *Le origini diplomatiche del patto d’acciaio* (Florence 1956), pp. 28-32, 385, 388

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revisionist-irredentist facade of German expansionism remained almost intact during the plebiscite crisis which led to the *Anschluss*, but the Hossbach conference had established a wider concept of territorial aggrandisement. There was, however, a mixture of urgency and dynamism in his speech at the conference, which was to be the guiding principle of his foreign policy in the period up to the outbreak of war. If the urgency may have been primarily attributed to his personal obsessions (a pathological fear that he would soon die¹⁰⁰) and to domestic pressures (inability to finance further rearmament under a peacetime economy, while his enemies were rapidly rearming), the dynamism was chiefly related to external factors. We shall turn now to these factors, and to their impact on the formulation of the Italian and German foreign policies between 1938 and May 1939.

The “next victim” syndrome and the impact of the Nazi successes upon Mussolini

The first external factor was the cumulative effect of the Nazi foreign policy successes from the beginning of 1938. Tim Mason has referred to the “next victim” syndrome which dominated German expansionism after the *Anschluss* in March 1938. He thus attributed the “promiscuity of aggressive intentions” demonstrated by the Nazi regime in 1938 and 1939 to an expansionist momentum that was nurtured by each successful campaign¹⁰¹. Every objective attained confirmed the *Führerprinzip*¹⁰², increased the regime’s confidence to its military potential and created a pressure for further expansion. Given Mussolini’s diplomatic support and Britain’s commitment to appeasement policies¹⁰³, Hitler saw an opportunity to use

¹⁰⁰ Speer, A., *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main 1969), p. 120. For the “psychoanalytical” approach to the fascist phenomenon see, amongst others, Königsberg, R., *Hitler’s Ideology. A Study in Psychoanalytic Sociology* (New York 1975); Binion, R., *Hitler Among the Germans* (New York 1976). For an evaluation of this approach see Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, p. 63; Vincent, pp. 146-7

¹⁰¹ Mason, T., “Intention and Explanation. A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism”, in Hirschfeld, G., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *Der “Führerstaat”: Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart 1981), pp. 33-4

¹⁰² On the way in which Hitler’s successes in foreign policy strengthened the appeal of the Führer-principle, but also created a further pressure for a constant affirmation of the principle through new foreign policy triumphs see Kershaw, I., *The “Hitler-Myth”. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford 1989), Ch. 5 (esp. pp. 134-5)

¹⁰³ On British appeasement policies see Mommsen, Kettenacker (eds.), *Fascist Challenge*, Part II, pp. 79-206

expansion to fulfil his regime's *Grossdeutschland* pledges and to intimidate his conservative critics in the armed forces and the administration. In 1938 and in the first half of 1939 he achieved an unprecedented extension of the Reich's territory without engaging his country in war with the western powers¹⁰⁴. This was not a major surprise in the *Anschluss* - after all, the British regarded the development as ineluctable since the late 1937 and did not refrain from saying so in their direct talks with Italian diplomats in February 1938¹⁰⁵. Yet, during the Sudeten crisis, it certainly demonstrated the tolerance of both Britain and Italy towards German expansion¹⁰⁶. The same happened in the liquidation of the remaining Czech state in March 1939. This was not simply successful expansion with major military and economic benefits¹⁰⁷. It also meant the affirmation of the Nazi expansionist ideology and of Hitler's personal control of foreign affairs. Consequently, the control of foreign policy planning and conduct shifted away from the various military and political organisations and was concentrated mainly on the figure of Hitler and his new foreign minister, von Ribbentrop.

For Mussolini the effect of the German successes was ambiguous. On the one hand, he attempted to exploit the dynamism of Nazi foreign policy in order to put further pressure on Britain and France for concessions¹⁰⁸. Italy's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1937 brought about a co-ordination of international fascism not only against Bolshevism, but also against Britain and her empire, as stated in the text and acknowledged by Ciano¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, the threat of German expansion in central and eastern Europe enabled Italy to play again a version

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, the enthusiasm of the population about Hitler's peaceful revisionism in Kershaw, *Hitler-Myth*, p. 131

¹⁰⁵ Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, pp. 365ff; Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 164ff (report of talks between Grandi and Chamberlain); *Ciano's Diaries, 1937-1938*, 21.2.1938

¹⁰⁶ For the British attitude see DGFP, D, 2, 88; and for the Italian, Santarelli, C., *Storia del movimento e del regime fascista* (Rome 1967), pp. 256-61. By contrast, the French government adopted a more anti-German policy [DGFP, D, 2, 98/204/647]

¹⁰⁷ On the incorporation of the conquered territories into the German economy see Freeman, M., *Atlas of Nazi Germany* (London & Sydney 1987), pp. 164-9

¹⁰⁸ In this light we should see the conclusion of the British-Italian Agreement of February 1938. See Morewood, pp. 177-81

¹⁰⁹ See the references in the original text of the protocol in DGFP, D, 1, 16; and Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1061ff. From the first moment, Neurath reacted to the pact, because he recognised its unmistakable anti-British character. See Heineman, pp. 153-6; and, for the attitude of the German diplomats, DGFP, D, 1, 17. For Ciano's comments see Lowe, Marzari, pp. 308-9; *Ciano's Diaries, 1937-1938*, 6.11.1937

of the “determinant weight” policy in European affairs. Mussolini’s role in the resolution of the Munich crisis established Italy as an important factor in the stability of the European system, due to her more or less good relations with both Germany and the western bloc¹¹⁰. This newly acquired prestige allowed the Italian Fascist government to negotiate with the British and the French for colonial concessions¹¹¹, while at the same time constantly strengthening its alliance with Germany *against* the “plutocratic democracies”¹¹².

On the other hand, Germany’s impressive military potential and her territorial aggrandisement in central Europe had a demoralising effect on Mussolini. Increasingly after the Austrian crisis he realised his relegation to a secondary position in the fascist partnership, stating that “when an event is fated to take place, it is better it takes place with you rather than despite of or against you”¹¹³. Until the beginning of 1939 he had hoped to utilise his diplomatic advantage in order to offset Italy’s weak economic-military position. The Munich conference gave him the impression that he could re-establish his country’s prominent position in the European system as a diplomatic arbitrator capable of influencing the German foreign policy¹¹⁴. This anticipation was soon to be thwarted by Hitler’s determination to pursue his expansionist objectives regardless of the diplomatic good offices of his ally. By that time Mussolini’s efforts to split the British-French front by isolating France had failed¹¹⁵. Chamberlain’s visit to Rome in January 1939 failed to alleviate the tension in the relations of the Italian regime with the west and cast a fatal shadow on the

¹¹⁰ For the improvement in the relations between Italy and the West, see Wiskemann, *Rome-Berlin Axis*, pp. 72-3; Quartararo, pp. 375ff, 395ff

¹¹¹ On the negotiations of the Italian regime with France and Britain for colonial concessions see Lowe, Marzari, pp. 310-4, and Morewood, pp. 181-2. See also DGFP, D, 2, 359; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 253-5

¹¹² Vigezzi, B., “Mussolini, Ciano, la diplomazia italiana e la percezione della ‘politica dei potenze’ all’inizio della seconda guerra mondiale”, in di Nolfo, E., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L’Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan, 1986), pp. 3-18

¹¹³ Quoted in Lowe, Marzari, p. 291

¹¹⁴ DGFP, D, 2, 611/661; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 252-3. This explains why Mussolini was initially negative to the idea of a military alliance with Germany presented to him in 1938 by Ribbentrop. This attitude changed in the aftermath of the Munich crisis, when the Duce became disillusioned with France’s limited concessions. See Pastorelli, P., “La politica estera”, pp. 110ff

¹¹⁵ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 312-4; Pastorelli, P. “La politica estera”, p. 112

negotiations with France for a general agreement¹¹⁶. Diplomatically, his only hope of retaining a role of prominence in European affairs was in a long-term alliance with Germany that would postpone war for the future, i.e. 1942 or after. This was his strategy behind an apparent Italian capitulation to Nazi foreign policy in the signing of the Pact of Steel in May 1939¹¹⁷. The commitment of the two sides to consultation prior to the assumption of major activities, and the express agreement on a postponement of military plans for at least three years offered those guarantees which the Italian side desperately needed to safeguard her political autonomy within the Axis camp.

Struggle for initiative: Italo-German antagonism within the Axis

The second external factor in the radicalisation of fascist expansionism was the political interaction between the two fascist regimes. It has been argued that Mussolini was resigned to a secondary position in the fascist alliance, and that he actually succumbed to the German expansionist dynamism after 1937¹¹⁸. This is only partly true. Objectively, the internationalisation of fascism after the Spanish civil war had resulted in an atmosphere of indirect competition between the two regimes. This was a battle that Italy, due to her inferior economic and military potential, was bound to lose. Increasingly from 1937, symptoms of an inferiority complex became evident in Mussolini's behaviour¹¹⁹. This explains to a great extent his growing obsession with the "great power" ideology in the last years before the war. In the logic of this ideology, however, it was impossible for him to abandon the idea of regaining the initiative - and the prestige associated with it. This tendency culminated after the outbreak of the war, when in the summer and autumn of 1940 Mussolini welcomed the opportunity to lead the Axis war against Britain after the failure of the German

¹¹⁶ Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, pp. 259-66 (conversations of Chamberlain with Ciano and Mussolini, 11/12 January 1939); Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, pp. 413ff; Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1982), pp. 137-9

¹¹⁷ Initially, Mussolini had rejected the plan [DGFP, D, 6, 426]. On the Pact see Quartararo, 396ff; Toscano, *Le origini diplomatiche*, pp. 46ff; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 265ff

¹¹⁸ Pastorelli, P., "La politica estera", p. 114; Mack Smith, "Appeasement in Mussolini's Foreign Policy", in Mommsen, Kettenacker (eds.), *Fascist Challenge*, pp. 258-66

¹¹⁹ See reports about "jealousy" on part of the Italian leadership in DGFP, D, 1, 743 (Weizsäcker report, 19 March 1938); D, 6, 199 (Heydrich to Ribbentrop, 14 April 1939)

operation "Sea Lion"¹²⁰. The original elements, however, of his stubborn refusal to accept his relegation may be traced in his expansionist moves against Albania and, later, Greece.

What, of course, Mussolini could not appreciate was that he had been forced to conceptualise his contest with Germany in *military* - rather than *diplomatic* - terms. This, in itself, was the outcome of the dynamism generated by the Nazi expansionism in 1938 and 1939, as well as a proof that the initiative completely eluded the Italian regime. After the Munich interlude, when diplomacy fared better than military threat, Mussolini followed an unorthodox diplomatic strategy towards Germany: either he made concessions to the German expansionism (i.e. acceptance of military alliance) in order to preserve his restraining influence on Hitler¹²¹; or he too resorted to expansionism to strengthen his bargaining position and restrain Germany in geographical terms. The latter objective underpinned the timing of Italy's decision to invade Albania in the April of 1939, just a few weeks after the liquidation of Czechoslovakia by Germany¹²². As we saw, Albania had traditionally been an area of Italian political influence and economic penetration since the beginning of the century¹²³. Its geopolitical importance for the control of the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean had been emphasised by Mussolini long before the decision for invasion was finalised¹²⁴. Until 1937, however, there had been no ideological or political reference to plans for expansion in that area¹²⁵. The invasion plan was clearly timed by the Italian government to balance the successes of Nazi expansionism in the wider central European area and to block further German

¹²⁰ Knox, M., *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941* (Cambridge 1982), p. 193. A more detailed analysis of this is provided below, Ch. 6, Section IV

¹²¹ See, for example, the denunciation of the 1935 Italian-French agreement [DGFP, D, 4, 374]; and the determination of the Italian government to initiate military talks with the other Axis states [D, 4, 421/454/462]

¹²² On the invasion of Albania see Lowe, Marzari, pp. 326-31. That the move against Albania was designed to irritate Germany and to hinder further German infiltration in the Balkans is proven by Ciano's note about the Italian alarm at Zogu's contacts with Germany early in 1939 [see Muggeridge, M. (ed.), *Ciano's Diaries* (London & Toronto 1947), 10/11-2-1939].

¹²³ Webster, R. A., *Industrial Imperialism in Italy 1908-1915* (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1975), pp. 316ff

¹²⁴ See, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IVc

¹²⁵ Pastorelli, L., *Italia e Albania, 1924-1927* (Florence 1967); and *ibid.*, "La storiografia italiana del dopoguerra sulla politica estera fascista", *Storia e Politica*, 10 (1971), p. 603

intervention in the Balkan sphere¹²⁶. Ironically, it was supported by Germany alone and thus increased suspicion in the west that it was part of a concerted Axis activity in the region¹²⁷. The result was a further radicalisation in the scope of fascist expansionist aspirations, as well as a deepening of the division between the Axis and the western blocs. It also reflected, however, how much the radicalisation of fascist expansionism from 1938 onwards had slipped away from the two regimes' capacity for rational foreign policy-making.

Dropping diplomacy: the shift towards aggressive expansion

The transformation of the two regimes' expansionist strategy was also a by-product of the dynamism unleashed by the expansionist ventures of the two fascist regimes in the 1930s. Until 1937 diplomacy constituted the primary technique which the two fascist regimes exploited in order to claim or acquire territorial concessions in Europe and overseas. At the same time, the demonstration of military power was mainly intended to enhance the impact of diplomatic pressure rather than consciously risk a major conflict. From the beginning of 1938, however, the situation started to change. Hitler, confident after his initial successes, decided to utilise his powerful - and now politically neutralised - diplomatic and military mechanisms in order to promote his expansionist plans more aggressively. By 1937, he had lost his patience with the diplomatic bargaining of the western appeasers, and subscribed to Ribbentrop's anti-British strategy, despite his contrary personal inclinations and long-term plans regarding Britain as an ally. The prospect of Britain's opposition to the German expansionist plans obliterated the last major use of diplomacy for Hitler¹²⁸. His foreign policy strategy between the *Anschluss* and the Polish campaign revealed a determination to pursue expansionist plans, by the use of force if necessary, without any intention of keeping up diplomatic appearances. In this way, he seemed increasingly prepared to risk a military confrontation and was determined

¹²⁶ See Mussolini's irritation with the liquidation of the Czech state [DGFP, D, 6, 87/140; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, p. 257]. Also, Toscano, *Le origini diplomatiche*, p. 232

¹²⁷ See the *Duce's* support for the liquidation of Czechoslovakia in DGFP, D, 6, 15; and Germany's support for the annexation of Albania in April 1939 in D, 6, 158/166/172/205; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1130

¹²⁸ DGFP, D, 1, 793

to use the whole of his military potential as the major instrument for the German expansionist plans. The most striking indication of this shift was the emphasis on naval rearmament, which by definition was directed against Britain. Although signs of an anti-British naval policy were evident since 1935, the funds allocated to naval rearmament increased almost ten-fold between 1932 and 1938, and this upward trend continued in 1939-40¹²⁹. The traditional militarist spirit, which had somehow been overshadowed by a more rational co-operation between diplomacy and armed forces during the Weimar period, re-emerged in its most extreme form in 1938-9¹³⁰. The major consequence was that the political recognition of German power by its allies and enemies became now associated with the power of the German armed forces. This also meant that the attainment of the *Grossdeutschland* objectives of the Nazi regime was now expected to result entirely from the country's military performance¹³¹.

Italian policies were not unaffected by this major change in the European system. Although militarism never had strong roots in the mentality of the Italian nation, the "export" of fascism from Germany and the antagonism between the two regimes introduced this novelty in the conduct of the Italian foreign policy. Mussolini had been traditionally more interested in the technological side of warfare - hence, his obsession with the plans to transform the *Regia Aeronautica* into the largest air force in Europe¹³². Of course, the social Darwinist origins of the Italian Fascist ideology dictated a cult of war, relating national prestige with military power. This, however, was quite different from the German association of foreign policy

¹²⁹ Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, pp. 85-6; Dülffer, J., "Determinants of German Naval Policy, 1920-1939", in *ibid.* (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa 1985), pp. 152-70; Salewski, M., "Navy and Politics in Germany and France in the Twentieth Century", in Müller, K.-J. (ed.), *The Military in Politics and Society in France and Germany in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford 1995), pp. 73-88 (esp. 83ff)

¹³⁰ A very interesting analysis on the relation between diplomacy and militarism in interwar Germany is M. Geyer's *Die Reichswehr und die Krise der Machtpolitik 1924-1936* (Wiesbaden 1980)

¹³¹ Craig, *Germany*, p. 713. See also Reynolds, C., *Modes of Imperialism* (Oxford 1981), pp. 154-5

¹³² Minniti, F., "La politica industriale del Ministero dell'Aeronautica. Mercato, pianificazione, sviluppo (1935-43)", *Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1981), pp. 5-55 and 271-312; Rochat, G., Massobrio, C., *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1945* (Turin 1978), pp. 230-5; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 22-4. On the development of the *Aeronautica* see Rochat, G., *Italo Balbo. Aviatore e ministro dell'aeronautica, 1926-1933* (Ferrara 1979); Rochat, G., "Mussolini e le forze armate", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 117-9

with expansion and war¹³³. Mussolini had demonstrated his liking for the role of diplomatic mediator in the European system. In 1938-9, he twice manifested his preference for a diplomatic solution to the claims of Nazi expansionism: in Munich and in the summer-autumn of 1939 with his plan for an international conference for the Polish issue¹³⁴. His antagonistic relation to the Nazi regime induced him to use military force to enhance the diplomatic and political prestige of his own regime, but he was not initially prepared to succumb to the extremism of Nazi aggression.

The situation changed from the moment that the alignment between the two fascist countries became closer. The accession of Italy to the Anti-Comintern pact and the signing of the Pact of Steel entailed the acceptance of a mainly offensive foreign policy by Mussolini. It is true that the *Duce* felt uneasy about the implications of these alliances, and this became evident in his refusal to enter the war in August 1939. He became, however, more accustomed to the idea of using his military potential to promote foreign policy goals and at the same time antagonise Nazi Germany - a tendency which eventually prompted the decision to enter the war in June 1940. Faced with the successful aggressive Nazi foreign policy, Mussolini too turned his back to the prospect of a diplomatic solution in the European affairs and subscribed to the option of war. This was the logical culmination of his own ideological and political commitments - his own expansionist vision of a vast Mediterranean *Impero*, but also his fixation with prestige and his desire to usurp the initiative from Germany¹³⁵.

Ideology versus short-term developments

The fourth factor of the radicalisation in fascist expansionist policies concerns the relation between ideology and action in fascism. As we have already seen, the programmatic approach to fascist expansionist tends to view ideological

¹³³ For the "cult of war" and the role of violence in fascist ideology, see, in this study, Ch. 2, Section IIIa

¹³⁴ DGFP, D, 6, 737; and Hitler's rejection of the idea, D, 7, 47. See also Lamb, R., *Ghosts of Peace, 1935-1943* (London 1987), pp. 93-120; Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler*, pp. 285ff; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 354-5

¹³⁵ Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica*, pp. 106ff, 119. All these issues are analysed below, Ch. 6, Section III

commitments and pronouncements as determinant factors in the conduct of German foreign policy, while it is less willing to concede a similar degree of consistency to the Italian expansionist programme¹³⁶. The relation, however, between ideology and foreign policy is a significantly more complicated one. The impact of the political and military alliance between the two fascist regimes, the dynamism that their co-operation and antagonism generated, played a crucial role in the joint expansionist programme of the fascist "new order". The expansionist element was inherent both in the ideological traditions of the two countries since unification¹³⁷, and lay at the heart of the fascist worldview. Irredentist aspirations, colonial compensations and revisionist claims kept that element alive in the period between 1919 and the mid-1930s. There were, however, two restraining factors. First, the stability of the European system did not allow for any serious discussion of territorial changes. Second, neither of the two countries - and especially Italy, which has been described as the "least of the great powers"¹³⁸ - initially possessed the necessary economic and military power to challenge this stability. For these reasons, at least until 1935, the idea of an extensive territorial expansion remained an active, yet essentially utopian characteristic of the Italian and German foreign policies.

The situation changed after the first successful revisionist attempts by both Italy (Ethiopia) and Germany (Rhineland, overthrow of the Versailles economic and military restrictions). A crumbling system of European security and the tolerant attitude of its main guarantors (Britain, France, Italy) towards German revisionism further encouraged the "next victim" syndrome of the Nazi leadership¹³⁹. At the same time, expansionism became the platform of the two fascist regimes' co-operation and competition, unleashing new opportunities and speeding up the process of radicalisation. This new framework of Italian-German rapprochement facilitated the attainment of previously unfeasible goals of Nazi territorial expansion. Had it not

¹³⁶ See the interesting discussion of the debate in Azzi, "Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy", pp. 187-93

¹³⁷ On the ideological origins of fascist expansionism see, in this study, Chs. 1-2

¹³⁸ Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War* (Cambridge 1979); Cassels, A., *Fascist Italy* (New York 1968), pp. 71-3

¹³⁹ See, for example, Chamberlain's opinion that if Hitler desired to invade and liquidate Czechoslovakia, he saw no possible way of actually preventing him from doing it. See DBFP, 3rd, 1, 198-235; Douglas, R., "Chamberlain and Appeasement", Mommsen, W. J., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983), pp. 79-88

been for Mussolini's "friendly" passivity and resignation during the *Anschluss* crisis (in sharp contrast to his forceful reaction in July 1934), Hitler would have not have been able to push the situation to extremes. His relief and gratitude was reflected in his exchange with Prince Philip of Hesse on 11 March 1938, where he repeated many times that he "would never forget him [Mussolini] for this". Yet, the new spirit of co-operation between the two fascist regimes was even more important for the Italian regime, as it has been disputed whether Mussolini would have embarked on an imprudently ambitious expansionist programme as early as in the late 1930s-early 1940s had it not been for Hitler's influence and the *Duce's* passion for precedence¹⁴⁰. Expansionism became the hard currency of fascist foreign policies, and by 1938 Mussolini had given priority to territorial expansion, both to promote Italy's geopolitical interests and to compete against Nazi Germany. The new international climate reactivated a latent extremism in Mussolini's foreign policy programme and strengthened his determination to pursue anti-system goals at the expense of his previous more "realistic" handling of foreign affairs¹⁴¹. The Italian regime was now more willing to pursue wide expansionist plans against the interests of international security in order to strengthen national power and prestige. This suggests that the decision to expand was the product of both an ideological *necessity*, rooted in the fascist worldview, and a political *opportunity* for expansion offered by international developments. This new-found political dynamism which facilitated the transition to radical expansionism (both as a positive action prescribed by Fascist ideology and as a reaction to German expansion) found fertile ground in the ideological traditions not only of the Fascist regime *per se*, but also of Italian nationalism in general, of which Fascism claimed the spiritual heritage¹⁴². What differentiated Fascist expansionism from previous nationalist visions was the Fascist regime's intention not to confine itself to colonial issues or to a cautious border policy on the continent, but to abandon

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 780ff; Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis* (London 1966, 2nd ed.), pp. 339-52, and Chs. 5-13; and Azzi, "Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy", pp. 196-7, for a discussion.

¹⁴¹ For Mussolini's initial "realism" see De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 798ff; Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, *passim*

¹⁴² Bosworth, R. J. B., "Italian foreign policy and its historiography", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Rizzo, G. (eds.), *Altro polo. Intellectuals and their Ideas in contemporary Italy* (Sydney 1983), pp. 65ff; *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London & New York 1998), pp. 99-101

the policy of equidistance and to upset the European territorial system in order to realise these previously utopian visions. At this point, the importance of German influence in the context of the Axis alliance becomes a crucial factor in understanding the changing tone of Italian foreign policy after 1935.

IV: Conclusions

The further radicalisation of the fascist expansionist policies during the Second World War II are dealt with elsewhere¹⁴³. This chapter has focused on the external origins of political radicalisation in the period from 1933 up to the last days of peace in August 1939. Within this chronological framework we should finally turn back to Hildebrand's question and apply it both to the German and Italian fascist regimes. How far, then, could Hitler and Mussolini implement their foreign policy ideas, and to what extent were they constrained by the international circumstances? The answer is that the radicalisation of fascist expansionism from the mid-1930s onwards owes much to the exclusive political interaction between the two fascist regimes. In the case of Germany, the diplomatic support that the Italian regime provided during the first stages of Nazi expansion (Austria, Czechoslovakia) was crucial to success and boosted the dynamism of Hitler's regime¹⁴⁴. In the case of Italy, the co-operation with Germany revived and radicalised an expansionist ideological tradition, while Mussolini's competition with Hitler was often expressed in the form of counter-expansion and thus increased the overall expansionist dynamism of the Axis alliance. The internationalisation of fascism after 1936 - and especially the victory of the fascists in the Spanish civil war - succeeded in fabricating a uniform political concept of fascism in the European affairs, in opposition to the other two main creeds, bolshevism and liberal democracy. It also generated a new "fascist order", based on alliance, expansion and the prospect of a future war. It did not, however, resolve the ideological and political differences

¹⁴³ See, in this study, Ch. 6

¹⁴⁴ This was something that Hitler was perfectly aware of. He had repeatedly insisted on the importance of Mussolini's diplomatic position for the promotion of German expansionist interests.

between the two regimes themselves. Apart from the restrictions that the British-French bloc imposed on Hitler's and Mussolini's freedom of action, the two fascist leaders had also to consider the fragile balance between Italian and German interests. This proved to be a major mutual restraining factor. On the one hand, not only did the Nazi leadership renounce the South Tyrol *irredenta*, but it also proposed a transfer of the German-speaking population to the *Reich*¹⁴⁵. On the other hand, the Italian leadership reciprocated by making all the diplomatic concessions that led to the *Anschluss* in March 1938. However, the antagonism between the two regimes seemed to grow with every success in the expansionist policies of either fascist regime. In the end, the Axis was much more than a superficial political invention, aimed to collectivise the heterogeneous anti-systemic aspirations of the two fascist regimes¹⁴⁶. It was the vehicle of an implicit competition between them which nurtured the process of fascist radicalisation and rendered even the most utopian aspirations of their visions appear realisable in the context of a fascist "new order".

Where does ideology stand in the radicalisation of fascist expansionism, then? The analysis of the domestic reasons and of the international circumstances which encouraged this tendency has resulted in a major reassessment of the role of ideological principles in this process. As we saw, the latter played an important role in producing a strong inclination for expansion and for equating national prestige with territorial aggrandisement. In political terms, however, an expansionist foreign policy also required an *external political momentum*¹⁴⁷. This was provided within the framework of the Axis alliance, and was strengthened by both collaboration and rivalry between the two fascist regimes. Expansion was an *option* prescribed by fascist ideology but not the inevitable outcome of either domestic crisis or ideological beliefs alone. That this option came to be treated by the fascist leaderships as the only remedy reaffirms that a certain ideological penchant for expansion existed in the two regimes' worldview. The internationalisation of

See Lochner, L. P. (ed.), *The Goebbels Diaries* (London 1948), 20.3.1942. Note, however, his disillusionment in 1943 with the achievements of Italian fascism, in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 2016

¹⁴⁵ On the issue of transfer see DGFP, D, 6, 163; "Questione dell'Alto Adige", in Levi, F., Levra, U., Tranfaglia, N. (eds.), *Storia d'Italia*, vol. II (Florence 1978), p. 925; Toscano, M., *Alto Adige - South Tyrol. Italy's Frontier with the German World* (Baltimore 1975), pp. 44-51

¹⁴⁶ Funke, "Die deutsche-italienische Beziehungen", esp. pp. 828-30

¹⁴⁷ Reynolds, pp. 160-6

fascism, the dynamism unleashed by initial successes, and the complex alliance between Italy and Germany, created a further political stimulus to the expansionist visions of the two regimes. This stimulus, strengthened by domestic pressures, transformed an initial limited expansionist *opportunity* into a radical, aggressive large-scale priority which gradually monopolised the domestic and foreign policy activities of the two fascist regimes. The tension between *collaboration* and *rivalry* sealed the history of the Axis alliance and helps to explain why latent ideological extremes were activated in the second half of the 1930s, and why certain expansionist policies of the two regimes were pushed further than it was initially desired or justified in rational political terms.

CHAPTER 6

Fascist expansionism and war: the triumph of the fascists and the collapse of fascism (1939-1945)

I: Introduction

The military conflict which developed into the Second World War was intended to be, and indeed was, the ultimate test for the two fascist regimes and the future of fascism in the international system. The Italian and German fascist leaderships had long acknowledged the political and social dynamism inherent in the state of war, and endeavoured to exploit this potential by resorting to a large-scale campaign in pursuit of their long-term territorial goals¹. War was intended to be the ultimate formula for unifying the *political* with the *mythical* aspects of fascist worldview; or, in other words, for uniting reality with utopia and deeds with words. Furthermore, the realisation of the two leaders' geopolitical and historic visions presupposed a radical transformation of the international status quo which could not be brought about by consensual procedures such as diplomacy and peaceful expansion. The radicalisation of fascist foreign policies in the second half of the 1930s widened the gap between what the two regimes demanded from territorial expansion and what the western powers were willing to concede in a long-drawn-out process of negotiation. The limited character of British and French appeasement confronted the two fascist leaders with the question of means-versus-ends: if Mussolini had failed to elicit sufficient territorial concessions from France in 1938

¹ Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London 1967, 3rd ed.), pp. 389-459. Cf. the remarks by Giuseppe Papini "A Nationalist Programme", in Lyttelton, A. (ed.), *Italian Fascisms: From Pareto to Gentile* (London 1973), pp. 106-7

and 1939², if Hitler had stumbled upon Chamberlain's "irredentist" proposals in Munich, these were indications that the mythical core of fascist expansionism could not be approximated by diplomatic means. At the same time, the establishment of the Axis alliance produced a powerful strategic alternative and a political momentum that were lacking before 1936. Taken together, these two factors transformed war and aggression from a vague ideological *desideratum* into a legitimate political instrument for future action.

Having said that, an all-out military showdown remained a far-from-certain development until 1939. The increasing determination of the two leaders to use the threat of force, or even actual force, in the second half of the 1930s to advance territorial goals did not, as we saw earlier, originate from a fixed decision to launch the Second World War. If Mussolini and Hitler, confident after the signing of the Pact of Steel in May 1939, spoke more openly about preparing for war and the unavoidability of a general conflict³, there is no evidence whatever of any definite ideas about the timing and the form of the future conflict. This point has been emphasised by M. Geyer, who has warned against the tendency either to "over-determine" war, as the consequence of a fixed fascist ideology, or to "under-determine" it, as the sole by-product of structural problems or failures⁴. We should also not forget that the war of 1939-1945 was both a *decision* (to enter the conflict, to set the targets for expansion) and a *strategy* (how to wage the war, given the various short- and long-term circumstances). There has been considerable discussion about the actual intentions of the two leaders in 1939-1940: did they categorically seek a military confrontation or was war the *ultima ratio* of their expansionist strategies? This debate will be reviewed later in the chapter separately for each regime. This is, however, only part of the problem surrounding the aims of the two regimes in the Second World War. The conflict took its shape gradually, through a series of

² For the negotiations see Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino* (Rome 1980), pp. 359ff; "Appendice a Inghilterra e Italia. Dal Patto di Pasqua a Monaco", *Storia Contemporanea*, 7 (1976), pp. 665ff; Lowe, C. J., Marzari F., *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London & Boston 1975), pp. 309-31

³ See. For example, DGFP, D, 6, 433; Quartararo, pp. 460ff; Toscano, M., *Le origini diplomatiche del patto d'acciaio* (Florence 1956), pp. 396ff

⁴ Geyer, M., "Restorative Elites, German society and the Nazi pursuit of goals", in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 139f

decisions and reactions to them which produced new and largely unforeseeable circumstances: Germany's decision to invade Poland in September 1939 and the reaction of the western powers; Italy's path from non-belligerence to the entry into the war in June 1940; the launch of Mussolini's "parallel war" in the autumn of 1940; and Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941. This chapter focuses on these pivotal decisions and assesses to what extent they were determined by ideological considerations or were imposed upon the two leaders by domestic or international pressures. In the context of this analysis, three main questions are addressed. First, did the two leaders intend to wage *this particular* war, at that particular *time* and in this particular *form* or *sequence of events*? Second, did they use the conflict to promote the mythical core of their expansionist visions or did their policies give way to war making with short-term considerations? Third, to what extent were their decisions compatible with, or antithetical to, the aspirations of non-fascist elite groups, on the one hand, and of party expectations, on the other?

II. Germany's decision to launch the war

There are various other indications that Hitler intended to use Poland as the pretext for launching his first war of aggression. The Munich conference represented for him exactly what should be *avoided* in the next crisis. He did not vent his irritation openly until little over than a week before invading Poland. In his speech to his generals on 22 August he declared his determination to avoid the interference of any *Schweinehund* and the repetition of the Munich compromise; this time he meant to "test [Germany's] military machinery"⁵. His vexation, however, was implicit in his secret speech to a group of *Wehrmacht* officers, where he stated that the war was

⁵ The text of the speech is to be found in DGFP, D, 7, 192/193; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1234-1240. For a discussion of the speech see Baumgart, W., "Zur Ansprache Hitlers von den Führern der Wehrmacht am 22. August 1939", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 16 (1968), pp. 120-49

imminent and would not be avoided this time⁶. This conviction was emphatically restated in his other major speech to his army commanders on 23 May: "there will be war.. a short war [or] ... a war of from ten to fifteen years' duration"⁷. Once the failure of the negotiations with the Polish government established Poland as the next victim of German aggression, Hitler took concrete steps to pre-empt any possible "irredentist" compromise formula. He had already informed the Danzig Nazi party of his decision not to accept any negotiated solution before giving specific orders to the German minority's organisation in Poland to remain inactive during the period of the crisis⁸. He repeatedly responded to the British proposals for a negotiated solution with promises of talks *after* the Polish campaign⁹. He also kept up appearances by alluding to a compromise proposal to the Polish government but gave specific orders not to release the plan until 1 September¹⁰. In his speech to the *Reichstag* announcing the invasion of Poland he could hardly hide his enthusiasm that his "repeated proposals" had been rejected¹¹.

At the same time, Hitler appeared to regard the campaign against Poland as a preliminary step in his plans for a showdown with the west. As he stated to the League of Nations' Commissioner for Danzig on 11 August, he would have to "beat the west" first before contemplating war in the east¹². Such a war contradicted one of the ideological constants in his expansionist vision - alliance with Britain - and entailed a major diversion from his priority to *Lebensraum* expansion in the territory of the Soviet Union. As we saw, however, his change of strategy in the summer of 1938 involved both an acceptance of the possibility that a war *against* the British Empire might occur and a decision to give priority to large-scale expansion

⁶ For the 10.2.1939 speech see the discussion in Weinberg, G. L., *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago 1980), pp. 514f; and *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 143-4

⁷ DGFP, D, 6, 433; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1196-1201, esp. pp. 1198-9

⁸ DGFP, D, 6, 126; D, 7, 195/196

⁹ See, for example, his reply of 14.8.1939 in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1229; and his reply of 25.8 in DGFP, D, 7, pp. 205, an excerpt of which is translated and reprinted in Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Nazism. A Documentary Reader*, vol. III: *Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (Exeter 1988), pp. 746-7

¹⁰ Weinberg, G. L., *A World at Arms. A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 43-7

¹¹ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1312ff (1 September 1939)

regardless of the attitude of the western powers¹³. Even before the culmination of the Czech crisis, on 28 May 1938, he had expressed his determination to attack the west *after* settling accounts with “the east”¹⁴. The same hope of avoiding a two-front war was expressed in the August 22 speech to the generals, where Hitler repeated his decision to turn against the west after the conclusion of the Polish campaign and the full mobilisation of German resources¹⁵.

When, however, the uncompromising British and French attitude in the summer of 1939 linked the two projects into one, determined to make Hitler’s invasion of Poland a *casus belli* between Germany and the west, the prospect of the much-dreaded two-front war became a distinct possibility throwing Hitler’s strategy once again in disarray¹⁶. The ratification of the treaty with Poland by the British government on 25 August caused considerable alarm and anger in the German leadership¹⁷. On top of that, the Nazi leadership learnt on the same day about Mussolini’s refusal to enter the conflict, contrary to Hitler’s and Ribbentrop’s expectations¹⁸. This was a highly undesirable double *volte-face* which prompted Hitler to cancel the provisional order for invasion - initially arranged for the 26th - setting instead the 2nd of September as the last possible day for the attack¹⁹. Two days later, he spoke again to the *Wehrmacht* generals insisting that the war was

¹² Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1225; the relevant excerpt is translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 739

¹³ See, in this study, Ch. 4, Section IVc

¹⁴ Wiedemann, F., *Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte* (Kettwig 1964), pp. 127ff

¹⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1236-7; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 557-8, 582f

¹⁶ On the changing British attitude after the Munich Conference see Dilks, D., “‘We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst’: the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler’s Germany, 1937-1939”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 73 (1987), pp. 309-52

¹⁷ For the treaty see Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 635ff; for its repercussions in Berlin see Jacobsen, Halder, I, pp. 34f

¹⁸ On Italy’s position see DDI, 8th, XIII, 147/154/167/182; DGFP, D, 7, 192/193. On Hitler’s anticipation of Mussolini’s help see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1234-5; for Ribbentrop’s confidence see Hill, L. (ed.), *Die Weizsäcker-Papiere, 1933-1950* (Frankfurt 1974), p. 160, and DGFP, D, 6, enclosure to Doc. 185, where Hitler stated confidently that “Italy’s attitude is determined by the Rome-Berlin Axis”.

¹⁹ Robertson, E. M., “German Mobilisation Preparations and the Treaties between Germany and the Soviet Union of August and September 1939”, in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M. (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke & London 1989), pp. 345ff; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 638f

inevitable²⁰ and rejected anew the prospect of a compromise solution for Danzig alone²¹. On 29 August he also launched a diplomatic initiative asking for a Polish Plenipotentiary to go to Berlin by the 30th, but the extremely tight deadline set by the German government implied at best a half-hearted commitment to the plan; an implication which was not missed by the British government who refused even to communicate the proposal to the Poles unless more time was allowed for the negotiations²². In the final directive for Operation White Hitler preferred to start the invasion one day earlier than his latest acceptable date, ordering the attack for the 1st of September²³. He also stated clearly that "if Britain and France open hostilities against Germany, it is the task of the *Wehrmacht* ... to contain their forces ... and thus maintain the conditions for a victorious conclusion of the operations against Poland"²⁴.

The other major diplomatic development of August 1939 was the signing of the German-Soviet pact of Non-aggression on the 23rd. The negotiations had started earlier that year, on a parallel level with the talks between the Soviet leadership and Britain²⁵. Moscow's tenet behind its policy of rapprochement with other European countries was to avoid a military conflict at a time when the Red Army was unprepared to meet the task, due to limited resources and the widespread purges of 1938²⁶. As negotiations with Britain reached a stalemate in early spring²⁷, Hitler embarked upon his boldest diplomatic venture - to lure Stalin into a political and military agreement. The replacement of Litvinov, advocate of collective security and

²⁰ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1276-7

²¹ DGFP, D, 7, 357

²² DBFP, 3rd, 7, 538/539, an excerpt of which is translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 748-9

²³ *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 146-50

²⁴ For the directive see DGFP, D, 7, 477-8; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 645-8

²⁵ For the negotiations see Weinberg, G. L., *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (Leyden 1972); *Starting World War II*, pp. 602ff; *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 168-81; Uldricks, T. J., "Soviet Security Policy in the 1930s", in Gorodetsky, G. (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991. A Retrospective* (London 1994), pp. 65-74

²⁶ Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 156ff; Erickson, J., "Threat identification and strategic appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930-1941", in Finney, P. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York & London 1997), pp. 334-50, here pp. 338-9

²⁷ Weinberg, *Starting World War II* pp. 613f

rapprochement with the west, by Molotov in May 1939 was a careful indicator of the changing Soviet attitude towards Germany and the Nazi government responded immediately²⁸. While in London there was bewilderment at the rejection of a vague proposal from Stalin for co-operation against Germany, Hitler was anxious to reach agreement regardless of the price²⁹. His offer of partitioning Europe was accompanied by an unconditional acquiescence in Molotov's demands for Russian control in the Baltic region and the northern Balkans. He also insisted that the date for the conclusion of the talks be brought forward to the 23rd, anxious to secure a few days' margin before launching Operation White, which at that time had been scheduled for the 26th³⁰. The Secret Protocol to the Agreement cast the die: the Vistula river would be the line of partition in Poland, while the northern border of Lithuania would represent the frontier between the two countries' spheres of influence³¹.

Why, then, did Hitler decide to launch a campaign which contradicted so blatantly all his long-term strategic constants - alliance with Britain, *Lebensraum* at the expense of the Soviet Union and avoidance of two-front war? A. J. P. Taylor believed that he was the victim of "diplomatic miscalculation" by delaying his proposal for the Polish Plenipotentiary until the 29th instead of launching it earlier and allowing ample time for negotiations³². Although he had repeatedly spoken of his decision to attack Poland regardless of the British and French attitude, Taylor's Hitler was a traditional German *Realpolitiker* who kept bluffing in anticipation of a British compromise proposal which would avert a totally undesirable war with the west. He was essentially an old-fashioned opportunist whose main priority was the revision of the Versailles Treaty and was determined to exploit all circumstances offered by international developments in order to achieve a favourable territorial readjustment. The only programmatic consistency which Taylor conceded to Hitler was the latter's desire to avoid a conflict over Poland, especially with Britain. In this

²⁸ DGFP, D, 7, 228; 6, 325; Erickson, pp. 336-7

²⁹ On the British proposal see DBFP, 3rd, 4, 597

³⁰ For the German offers to the Soviet Union see DGFP, D, 7, 56/70/75/79. For the demand to bring forward the date of the agreement see DGFP, D, 7, 149

³¹ For the text of the pact see DGFP, D, 7, 284, parts of which (and the whole Secret Protocol) are translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 743-4

sense, invasion was reluctantly authorised in the very last days of August after the failure of diplomatic initiatives³³.

The significance of Taylor's interpretation lay in its effort to redirect the historiographical attention from the "demonic" nature of Hitler's personality to the international factors which contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War. It also introduced an interesting debate about the continuities in post-unification German expansionist policy, thus paving the way for Fischer's controversial work on the subject a few years later³⁴. His account, however, of Hitler's strategic thinking at the period prior to the invasion of Poland was blurred by emphasis on long-term continuities and disregarded its deviation in two crucial areas. *First*, Taylor's insistence on portraying Hitler as averse to the prospect of a military conflict with Poland is incompatible with a substantial body of evidence. On numerous occasions during 1938-39 Hitler provided a retrospective account of his foreign policy as following consistent priorities leading to an inevitable showdown with Poland and the west³⁵. Taylor might have been correct in reading the *Führer's* comments as mere propaganda and *ex post facto* justification³⁶ but he did not sufficiently account for the reasons behind the radicalisation of Nazi expansionist policies from 1938 onwards. Signs of this radicalisation may be detected in the Hossbach Conference in November 1937 (whose literal value Taylor summarily dismissed³⁷), but it was the Czech crisis which provided the first tangible manifestation of Hitler's willingness to

³² Taylor, A. J. P., A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1961), pp. 69f

³³ Taylor, *Origins*, pp. 277-8. See also the discussion in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 750-4; Williamson, D. G., *The Third Reich* (Harlow 1995, 2nd ed.), pp. 59-60; Boyce, R., "Introduction", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M. (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke & London 1989), pp. 1-32. Indicative of the acidity of the debate in the 1970s is the collection of relevant contributions in Robertson, E. M. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War. Historical Interpretations* (London & Basingstoke 1971) - see, amongst others, Trevor-Roper, H., "A. J. P. Taylor, Hitler and the War", pp. 83-99, and Taylor, A. J. P., "War Origins Again", pp. 136-41

³⁴ Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Basingstoke & London 1985), pp. 22, 181-2; Boyce, pp. 3f

³⁵ See, for example, Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 224ff; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1196-1201 (speech to generals, 23.5.1939); pp. 1234-8 (speech to the generals, 22.8.1939)

³⁶ Taylor, "War Origins Again", pp. 139-41; Mason, T. W., "Some Origins of the Second World War", in Robertson (ed.), *Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 107ff

use Germany's military power in an offensive campaign for expansion. The timely intervention of Chamberlain and Mussolini in September 1938 did avert a general conflict over Czechoslovakia but, ironically, strengthened Hitler's determination to deal with the rump state of Czechoslovakia and Poland in an uncompromising manner, rejecting diplomatic solutions or "a repetition of Czechia"³⁸. The Polish government had been given a chance to yield to Germany's condition for the return of the Free City of Danzig to the Reich in return for a guarantee of Polish independence. Their adamant refusal to give in to pressure, and the British guarantee to Polish independence in March 1939³⁹, convinced Hitler that Poland should be the first victim of his formidable armed forces. As the Chief of the General Staff of *Wehrmacht*, Halder, commented in the summer of 1939, the *Führer* was determined to have his war in Poland⁴⁰.

Second, Taylor disregarded the impact of Ribbentrop's ideas on Hitler's strategic thinking in 1938-39⁴¹. His belief in the unavoidable conflict with Britain dated back to 1936, during his term as Ambassador in London, but was reiterated even more emphatically in 1937 and 1938⁴². Hitler's interpretation of the international situation before the Polish campaign incorporated two of Ribbentrop's pivotal strategic convictions: namely, that the large-scale war in the east would not be tolerated by Britain, thus rendering a reckoning with the west a *conditio sine qua non* for eastern expansion; and that the unpreparedness of British military forces would impede a large-scale war with the west until 1940-1⁴³. Hitler did his best to

³⁷ Taylor, *Origins*, pp. 287ff. Cf. Koch, H. W., "Hitler and the Origins of the Second World War: Second Thoughts on the Status of Some of the Documents", *Historical Journal*, 11 (1968), pp. 125-43

³⁸ DGFP, D, 6, 433; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1195-99 (conference with the *Wehrmacht* leadership and Goering, 23 May 1939)

³⁹ Weinberg, G. L., *Hitler's Foreign Policy*, vol. 2: *Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago 1980), pp. 555-6

⁴⁰ Jacobsen, H.-A. (ed.), *Generaloberst Halder: Kriegstagebuch* (Stuttgart 1962), vol. 1, pp. 7f

⁴¹ Eatwell, R., *Fascism: A History* (London 1995), pp. 136-7

⁴² For example, his comments against Britain and France in 1937 in ADAP, D, 1, 19; Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, vol. I: *Volksgemeinschaft und Grossmachtpolitik* (Munich 1985), pp. 241-6. See also, in this study, Ch. 3, Sections III and IV

⁴³ Michalka, W., "Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 165-72; and "Die nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik im Zeichen eines 'Konzeptionen-Pluralismus' - Fragestellungen und Forschungsaufgaben", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur*

isolate the campaign against Poland from the project of war against the west. He had engineered the pact with the Soviet Union as the ultimate deterrent to British engagement in Poland, but Chamberlain's reply stressed that the pact would not impede Britain from honouring her guarantee to Poland⁴⁴. The decision to cancel the attack on 25 August revealed the *Führer's* willingness to allow some more time to the efforts of isolating Poland from Britain⁴⁵. What, however, Taylor failed to take into account was that Hitler's strategy had undergone a far-reaching change, of which his intransigence during the Munich crisis was only the first indication. Apart from having accepted the probability of having to fight the west before turning to the east, he also decided that the attitude of Britain should not determine his expansionist priorities or timetable. By August 1939 his directives for Operation White stated that "the destruction of Poland is the priority" even if "war breaks out with the west"⁴⁶. British neutrality would be a welcome development, but not a sufficient reason to call off the operation, a conviction reiterated in the final directive for the attack⁴⁷. This was the impression of the majority of the *Wehrmacht* generals - Hitler and Ribbentrop meant war this time⁴⁸.

The choice of Poland as the battlefield for the first military campaign of the Nazi regime raises reasonable questions about social imperialist motives behind Hitler's decision to order the invasion. The Munich crisis had exposed the negative feelings of the majority of the German population at the prospect of aggressive expansion, while at the same time confronting Hitler with the reluctance of his generals to risk a general war for the sake of a secondary territorial goal like

Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 59f. For a discussion of Michalka's assessment of Ribbentrop see *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London 1989, 2nd edition), p. 114

⁴⁴ Robertson, "German Mobilisation", pp. 342-50. For the British reply see DBFP, 3rd, 7, 79/127/128/145. See also Aster, S., *1939: The Making of the Second World War* (London 1973), Ch. 9

⁴⁵ Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 638ff; Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, p. 160

⁴⁶ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1299-1300

⁴⁷ Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, I, pp. 46f

⁴⁸ See, for example, Wagner, E. (ed.), *Der Generalquartiermeister. Briefe und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen des Generalquartiermeisters des Heeres, General der Artillerie Eduard Wagner* (Munich 1963), pp. 98-109; Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, pp. 158-60; Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 143-5

Czechoslovakia⁴⁹. Poland, on the other hand, had traditionally been viewed with hostility by both the *Reichswehr* and the *Wilhelmstrasse* officials, not only due to the issue of Danzig but also because the whole state owed its existence to the Versailles *Diktat*⁵⁰. Therefore, Hitler's determination to proceed with a united domestic front could be best served through the manipulation of the emotive issue of the Corridor in order to justify the risk of a military conflict⁵¹. In this calculation, Hitler proved right. The decision to prioritise Operation White and break off negotiations with Poland in April 1939 was greeted with enthusiasm by no more an opponent of war against Czechoslovakia in 1938 than the State Secretary von Weizsäcker⁵². The prospect of witnessing the re-incorporation of the territories of eastern Prussia to the Reich created an atmosphere of anticipation, both amongst the conservative élites and the German population, that was in complete contrast to the apathy or even alarm during the Czech crisis⁵³.

However, this impression of unity was shattered in August 1939, as a result of two separate developments. First, the alarming prospect of a showdown with the west revived the same fears that had dominated the conservative opposition to Hitler's plans for war against Czechoslovakia. Only a few high-ranking officials of the *Wehrmacht* could still express their unqualified support and optimism⁵⁴. The majority had once again assumed the role of the "dove", fearing the prospect of a two-front war⁵⁵. During the Salzburg meeting between Ribbentrop and Ciano, Canaris had strove to elicit a definite refusal from the *Duce*, hoping that it would suffice to curb Hitler's reckless aggressive intentions⁵⁶. Now, even Weizsäcker had second thoughts, especially after the reports about Britain's determination to fight alluded to a completely different picture than the one delineated by Hitler and

⁴⁹ Kershaw, I., *The "Hitler-Myth". Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford 1989), pp. 132-9. For the attitude of the military during the Czech crisis see, in this study, Chs. 3-4

⁵⁰ See Bülow's memorandum of April 1933 and its endorsement by the then Foreign Minister, von Neurath, discussed in this study, Ch. 3, Section III

⁵¹ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1234-40 (speech to generals, 22 August 1939); Robertson, "German Mobilisation", pp. 336ff

⁵² ADAP, D, 7, 119

⁵³ Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, pp. 157-8

⁵⁴ See Wagner (ed.), *Generalquartiermeister*, pp. 108-9

⁵⁵ Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 144-5; Robertson, "German Mobilisation", pp. 356f

Ribbentrop⁵⁷. At the same time, although there was significantly less alarm amongst the population at the escalating crisis with the west, this was mainly due to the belief (or hope) that Hitler would still manage to repeat the Munich formula, namely to extend the Reich's territory peacefully⁵⁸.

The second development was the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact of Non-aggression. This Nazi stratagem to avoid a two-front war convinced the *Wehrmacht* leadership that a major obstacle for Operation White had been lifted and restored some optimism amongst the high command⁵⁹. The generosity, however, of the agreement to the Soviet Union, allowing her to occupy a large portion of Poland and to extend her supremacy in the Baltic region, mitigated the initial positive impression. Weizsäcker and Goering endorsed the pact only as a major trump card to avoid the impending confrontation with the west, in spite of his opposition to the extensive concessions to the Soviet Union⁶⁰. Others, like Rosenberg, criticised what seemed to be an alliance with the ideological arch-enemy of the Reich. In the last crucial days of August Rosenberg deplored the "moral loss of face" of the Nazi regime and ventured a gloomy metaphysical prediction - "revenge will fall on National Socialism one day for this ideological repudiation"⁶¹. When eventually the war broke out in September 1939, the attitude of the public was calm but far from enthusiastic. In spite of the careful propaganda preparation of the population, the vilification of the Polish state and the triumphant rhetoric surrounding the return of Danzig to the Reich, public opinion remained desirous of a quick settlement to avert or, after the 1st of September, to end the war⁶².

⁵⁶ DDI, 8th, XIII, 10/67

⁵⁷ On Weizsäcker's changing attitude see Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, Ch. 14. On the reports from London see, for example, DGFP, D, 6, 608; and Ribbentrop's optimism in D, 6, 630

⁵⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler-Myth*, pp. 138-47

⁵⁹ Jäckel, E., "Hitlers Kriegspolitik und ihre nationalen Voraussetzungen", in Hildebrand et al. (eds.), *1939: An der Schwelle zum Weltkrieg* (Berlin 1990), pp. 26-29

⁶⁰ Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, pp. 180-1; Overy, R. J., *Goering. The 'Iron Man'* (London 1984), pp. 91-4

⁶¹ Seraphin, H. G., *Das Politische Tagesbuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/5 und 1939/40* (Göttingen, Berlin & Frankfurt 1956), entries for 22 and 25.8.1939. See also Cecil, R., *The Myth of the Master Race. Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London 1972), pp. 179ff

⁶² Steinert, M. G., *Hitler's War and the Germans. Public Mood and Attitude towards the Second World War* (Ohio 1977), pp. 49f; Kershaw, *Hitler-Myth*, pp. 143-57; Weinberg, *Hitler*, pp. 144-5

The waning public support for Hitler's political blend of militarisation and mobilisation for war in 1938-39, combined with his hurried preparation to launch the attack on Poland against the counsel of prominent party figures, prompted T. Mason to formulate a modified version of the social imperialist argument with regard to the decision for war in August 1939⁶³. Mason's account was a far more elaborate attempt to restate the "primacy of domestic politics" thesis, in that he did accept that "Nazi Germany was always bent *at some time* upon a major war of expansion", originating from the regime's ideological obsession with racial theories and anti-bolshevism⁶⁴. His emphasis, however, was on the timing of Hitler's project to launch war and his headlong preparation to embark on a campaign which contradicted all his long-term strategic preoccupations. According to Mason, Hitler and Ribbentrop were very well aware of the British determination to fight for Poland and launched Operation White in full awareness that it would lead to a general conflict with the west⁶⁵. Mason also interpreted Hitler's wavering strategy towards Poland in 1933-39 as an indication that he intended to use her as an ally against the Soviet Union in a future war of conquest. His sudden change of mind in early 1939 can only be attributed to domestic pressures which necessitated a quick, easy foreign policy triumph to raise public morale⁶⁶. What were these domestic pressures then? Mason listed the regime's failure to produce a coherent overall social policy which caused considerable labour unrest, the "overheating" of the German economy by 1938-39 which impeded the realisation of the extremely ambitious rearmament targets for 1939, the rapid decline in living standards as a result of the sacrifices needed to approximate these targets, and the crisis of the whole Nazi rearmament policy as a result of erratic, non-

⁶³ See Mason, T., "Innere Krise und Angriffskrieg 1938-9", in Forstmeier, F., Volkmann, H. E. (eds.), *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf 1975), pp. 158-88; *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen 1977); "The Domestic Dynamics of Nazi Conquest", in Childers, T., Caplan, J. (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York, London 1993), pp. 161-89; *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik, 1936-1939* (Opladen 1975); for a discussion of Mason's argument see Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 44-9, 78-81, 112

⁶⁴ Mason, T. & Overy, R., "Debate: Germany, 'domestic crisis' and war in 1939", *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), pp. 205-40; "Innere Krise", pp. 186f

⁶⁵ Mason, *Sozialpolitik*, pp. 40ff; "Debate", pp. 219f

⁶⁶ Mason, T., "Intention and Explanation. A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism", in Hirschfeld, G., Kettenacker, L. (eds.), *Der "Führerstaat". Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart 1981), pp. 23-42

programmatic decision-making in the previous years⁶⁷. This situation, according to Mason's analysis, amounted to a deep socio-economic crisis which necessitated expansion, a "smash-and-grab" policy and the ruthless exploitation of the resources and the populations of the conquered areas. This necessity underpinned Hitler's *volte-face* in August 1939, when he jettisoned his long-term strategic constant (alliance with Britain), allied Germany with her supposed arch-enemy and rushed headfirst into an unwanted general conflict⁶⁸.

Mason's argument offered an interesting perspective upon Nazi foreign policy and the decision for war from the viewpoint of a "history from below". His interpretation of the timing of the invasion of Poland provided an emphasis on the structural factors behind the decision without, however, disregarding Hitler's long-term intentions. He correctly identified Poland as a secondary objective for Hitler's expansionist vision and highlighted the latter's lack of clear short-term strategy in those crucial months of 1939. He also accurately located serious problems in the regime's long-term economic and social policy and gave a rational assessment of the system's capabilities and weaknesses. Here lies, however, the major weakness of Mason's social imperialist argument. Whether the cumulative problems of rearmament and lack of coherent planning amounted to a crisis situation in 1938-39 is a technical matter of definition, as the acrimonious debate between T. Mason and R. J. Overy has shown⁶⁹. Yet Mason's emphasis on *perceptions* of crisis, based on a rational reading of the socio-economic conditions, overestimated the capacity for rational assessment and decision-making in the Nazi system. There is absolutely no evidence in Hitler's expositions in 1938-39 which alludes to a realisation of any deadlock, nor any indication that his *volte-face* in the first half of 1939 originated from any such awareness⁷⁰. Examples of concern or even alarm from bureaucrats

⁶⁷ Mason, *Arbeiterklasse*, pp. 103ff; "Debate", pp. 215ff. For a discussion of these arguments see Hancock, E., *The National Socialist Leadership and Total War, 1941-5* (New York 1991), pp. 19ff

⁶⁸ Mason, "Debate", pp. 214ff; *Sozialpolitik*, pp. 30ff

⁶⁹ For Overy's rejection of the notion of crisis see Overy, R. J., "Germany, 'Domestic Crisis' and War in 1939", *Past and Present*, 116 (1987), pp. 138-68; "Hitler's War Plans and the German Economy", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M. (eds.), *Paths to War*, esp. pp. 119-21. See also Mason & Overy, "Debate", pp. 205-40

⁷⁰ Orlow, D., *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919-1945*, vol. II: 1933-1945 (Pittsburgh 1973), pp. 230ff; Carr, W., *Arms, Autarky and Aggression. A Study in German Foreign Policy 1933-1939* (London 1972), pp. 64-5

about the future of German economy abounded in Mason's accounts. Even such high-ranking Nazi officials such as Goering and Goebbels expressed doubts about risking a major war in these circumstances, the first because he wanted to see the completion of the 1938-39 rearmament programme, the second fearing the impact on public opinion⁷¹. Yet, the authoritarian tendencies of the Nazi system had insulated Hitler's predominant position in the decision-making process, especially in the field of foreign affairs, which he regarded as a near-exclusive political privilege⁷². This might not have been *rational*, but it shows why a "history from below", placing primary emphasis on social issues and economic decisions, distorts the significance of the leader-oriented character of the Nazi decision-making process and fails to show that this socio-economic reality very rarely reached the highest echelons of the Nazi leadership⁷³.

Furthermore, Mason overestimated the capacity of the system for rational assessment in the crucial area of international developments. He interpreted Hitler's decision to launch Operation White as bewildering since the German leader had been repeatedly warned by the British government that "any attempt by a state to dominate the world... must be resisted" and that "they are prepared to employ without delay all the forces at their command" even after the conclusion of the pact with the Soviet Union⁷⁴. If experienced diplomats - such as Weizsäcker and Dirksen - or Wiedemann, Hitler's own adjutant, were almost convinced about Britain's determination to fight, there is no reason why Hitler should not have been. His declared belief that the western powers could not honour their commitments to Poland stemmed from his earlier impression that British defence policy would not achieve a sufficient level of mobilisation before 1941⁷⁵. Yet, his decision to call off the attack on the 25th and his subsequent instructions regarding a possible

⁷¹ Overy, R. J., *Göring: The 'Iron Man'* (London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley 1984), pp. 80-108; Kube, A., "Hermann Goering: The Second Man in the Reich", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 65ff; Irving, D., *Göring: A Biography* (New York 1989), pp. 255ff; Heiber, H., *Goebbels* (New York 1972), pp. 250-2; Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, pp. 620-1; Hancock, pp. 21-2

⁷² On this issue see, in this study, Ch. 3

⁷³ Overy, "Debate", pp. 235-40

⁷⁴ Chamberlain, N., *In Search of Peace* (London 1939), pp. 276-7 (and the report of the speech in Germany in DGFP, D, 6, 23); DBFP, 3rd, 7, 145

⁷⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1236; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 741

involvement of the west in Poland reveal his awareness of the high stakes involved in the launching of Operation White⁷⁶. With hindsight, his decision to proceed with the invasion in the face of British opposition might have been a “miscalculation”⁷⁷, but it was far more ideologically conditioned than Mason conceded. Hitler had chosen to play down the seriousness of the British threats, convinced that the British armed forces could not effectively fight a European war. His impression from Munich had fostered his view that the western leaders were “small fry” and “below average”, an accurate reflection of the declining “spiritual power” of the British and French nations. Poland would be overrun with a “lightning” action within a very short period of time, according to the natural law of “the stronger man is right”, he argued to his generals on 22 August⁷⁸. In spite of British warnings that such swift action would not lessen the west’s determination to fight, he ignored Goering’s last-minute appeal to abandon the plan and decided to play for all or nothing⁷⁹, still hoping that the danger from a British-French military action was minimal at that stage.

This leads us to the last weakness in Mason’s argument - the insufficient attention to Hitler’s foreign policy strategy. Mason’s emphasis on domestic, exclusively German factors seems less appropriate for interpreting the actions of a leader so alert to international circumstances and opportunities offered by external developments. He therefore disregarded the significance of the *Führer*’s change of strategy just before the Czech crisis. In his speech to the Generals on 22 August 1939, Hitler insisted that his international opponents’ alleged political and military weakness offered a window of opportunity that would not last forever. He was determined to seize the initiative and dictate the rules of international relations rather than being constrained by the slow-moving, over-cautious western policy of appeasement. As he mentioned several times in August, he would rather fight the west now than in the distant future, alluding once again to his fear that time was

⁷⁶ For the instructions regarding the west see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1299-1300 (Directive 1, 31 August 1939). This view is supported by Weinberg, *Starting World War II*, Ch. 14

⁷⁷ Robertson, “German Mobilisation”, p. 355

⁷⁸ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1236-7; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 743; DGFP, D, 7, 192/193; Overy, “Debate”, pp. 238-40

⁷⁹ Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, pp. 207-8

running out for Germany and for him personally⁸⁰. Therefore, the invasion of Poland was a *personal* enterprise, a confirmation of Hitler's monopoly of strategic wisdom in foreign-policy decision-making, and a prelude to a wider confrontation first with the west and then with the east. Faced with a clash between his *ideal* vision of expansion and the adverse reality of domestic (not optimum level of preparation) and international circumstances (opposition from the west; Italian "non-belligerence"), Hitler made a decisive choice to pursue his mythical project regardless, confident that he would be able to shape the political prerequisites of victory in the process. His failure to choose the time of dealing with the Britain and France was regretted, as his sentimental reaction to the British ultimatum on 3 September showed⁸¹, but again it was not a sufficiently strong factor to detract him from his strategic agenda. At the same time, reservations expressed by prominent party figures (Rosenberg, Goering, Goebbels) had no effect and definitely no political place in a system where the leader's will was paramount. Most of them targeted Ribbentrop, but became unintelligible once the *Führer* had decided to proceed with his aggressive plans without any further delay.

III. Italy's decision to enter the war

Mussolini's decision to declare Italy's non-belligerence in September 1939 and to enter the conflict ten months later raises complex questions about his ideological and strategic consistency, as well as his freedom of action. Undoubtedly, the refusal to join the war in September stemmed from an awareness of Italy's

⁸⁰ Burckhardt, C. J., *Meine Danziger Mission, 1937-1939* (Munich 1962), pp. 272-3; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1236ff. Cf. his similar comments at the Hossbach conference in Domarus, I, pp. 748-9 (5 November 1937)

⁸¹ See Schmidt, P., *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, 1923-1945* (Bonn 1950), pp. 462-4, translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 756-7. Weinberg doubts the accuracy of the account - see his *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 91-2

military unpreparedness and a lack of strategic interest in a war in eastern Europe⁸². However, references in the Cavallero Memorandum of May 1939 to the need to postpone war for three or four years have raised doubts about Mussolini's overall inclination to use war as an instrument for promoting his expansionist vision. R. De Felice interpreted these references as an indication of the *Duce*'s peaceful intentions, while Quartararo saw them as an attempt to avoid an irreversible commitment to the Nazi policy of aggression⁸³. They both pointed to Mussolini's "decision" not to fight in August 1939, to his attempts to mediate between Germany and Poland and to his intention to break off the alliance with Germany after the signing of the German-Soviet pact as evidence that he neither meant to wage war nor to succumb to the alliance with Germany⁸⁴. Quartararo also described Italian policy during the period of non-belligerence as a consistent attempt to avoid military commitment, to negotiate with the unresponsive British side and finally to postpone the half-hearted intervention as long as possible⁸⁵. The eventual decision to declare war, according to De Felice and Rochat, entailed a "modest commitment", underpinned by the belief in a short war and a swift, "better peace"⁸⁶. A similar conclusion was reached by D. Mack Smith who saw Italy's entry into the war as a diplomatic move and not a real military commitment to large-scale expansion and war-making⁸⁷. By contrast, M. Knox interpreted Mussolini's path to war as the culmination of an increasingly aggressive expansionist strategy since 1938. According to him, the *Duce*'s references in May 1939 to the unavoidable showdown with the west should be taken at face

⁸² Whittam, J., "The Italian General Staff and the Coming of the Second World War", in Preston, A. (ed.), *General Staffs and Diplomacy Before the Second World War* (Totowa, New Jersey 1978), pp. 77-97; Rochat, G., "Mussolini e le forze armate", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 127-32; Bottai, G., *Diario, 1935-1944* (Milan 1994), 26.8.1939; Quartararo, R., *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940* (Rome 1980), pp. 521ff

⁸³ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. II: *Lo Stato Totalitario, 1936-1940* (Turin 1981), pp. 618-40; Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, Ch. 8

⁸⁴ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, vol. II, passim; Quartararo, pp. 519-66. For Mussolini's thoughts about breaking off the Pact of Steel see DDI, 8th, XIII, 264

⁸⁵ Quartararo, pp. 604ff

⁸⁶ De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. 1: *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943* (Turin 1990), pp. 92-105; Rochat, "Mussolini e le forze armate", pp. 127-32

⁸⁷ Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1982), pp. 216ff

value instead of being dismissed as mere bluff⁸⁸. Similarly, P. Alatri viewed the same decision as the logical culmination of Mussolini's overall expansionist strategy since 1935, while G. Rumi maintained that it stemmed from his vast geopolitical ambitions in the Mediterranean and was not simply dictated by the dynamism of Nazi expansionism⁸⁹.

This historiographical debate highlights two separate but interconnected issues regarding the long-term characteristics of Italian foreign policy. The first pertains to Mussolini's attitude to war as an option in his expansionist strategy. The second regards the Italian regime's commitment to the Axis alliance and the project of a new territorial order in Europe throughout the period of non-belligerence. We saw in the previous two chapters that the Italian Fascist regime displayed a growing determination to employ the threat of aggression or actual force in promoting expansionist goals after 1935, and that the alliance with Nazi Germany provided the impetus for the radicalisation of the Italian foreign policy objectives. Although Mussolini concluded the Pact of Steel under the assumption that war would not be considered at least until 1942⁹⁰, there are indications that he had seriously considered the option of war before 1940. Since December 1937 he had given orders to General Pariani to draft operational plans for an attack on Egypt in the event of a German war against France⁹¹. This project was accompanied by a major study by the *Regia Marina* regarding the feasibility of a landing at the Suez Canal and a parallel occupation of Malta⁹². Although the plans were apparently abandoned in the wake of the Czech crisis in September 1938, just before the Munich Conference Mussolini

⁸⁸ Knox, M., *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941. Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 102; "The fascist regime its foreign policy and its wars: an 'anti-anti-fascist' orthodoxy?", in Finney, P. (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London & New York 1997), pp. 157-65; "Conquest, Domestic and Foreign, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany", *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), passim. On Mussolini's comments about war with the West see Muggeridge, M. (ed.), *Ciano's Diaries, 1939-1943* (London & Toronto 1947), 9 and 12.5.1939

⁸⁹ Alatri, P., *Le origini del fascismo* (Rome 1963); Rumi, G., "'Revisionismo' fascista ed espansione coloniale (1925-1935)", in Aquarone, A., Vernassa, M. (eds.), *Il regime fascista* (Bologna 1974), pp. 435-64. For a general discussion of these views see Petersen, J., "La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L'Italia fra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 45-56

⁹⁰ Toscano, *Origini diplomatiche del patto d'acciaio*, pp. 308-12; Mack Smith, D., *Le guerre di Duce* (Bari & Rome 1976, 2nd edition), pp. 218ff

⁹¹ Ceva, L., *Storia della società italiana: le forze armate* (Torise 1981), Ch. 13

⁹² Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 18-21

ordered the mobilisation of the Italian army and navy for a possible war in the eastern Mediterranean in case of a conflict between Germany and the west⁹³. A few months later, in his famous speech to the Grand Council in February 1939, he expressly stated that Greece and Egypt should be considered as “enemies of the Italian expansion” in the Mediterranean, impeding Italy’s “march to the Ocean”⁹⁴. In the same frame of mind, Ciano expressed his belief that the Balkans would soon become the battlefield of the struggle between the “totalitarian and the democratic” fronts, stating that the Axis alliance will enable Italy to extend her control over the Balkans⁹⁵. In this general conflict between the two fronts, as Ciano claimed, Italy would “crush” France and establish her predominance in the Mediterranean⁹⁶.

The Salzburg meeting between Ciano and Ribbentrop in August 1939, where the - hitherto secret - plans for the German attack on Poland were unveiled, caused indignation to the Italian leadership and prompted a re-examination of the regime’s foreign policy⁹⁷. In spite, however, of the Italian proposals for a negotiated solution to the Polish crisis and Ciano’s angry comments about the insincerity of Nazi policy⁹⁸, Mussolini’s position remained far from certain throughout the rest of August⁹⁹. Until the 19th he still contemplated military action against Greece and hoped that the long-awaited internal collapse of Yugoslavia would enable him to move into Croatia¹⁰⁰. Ciano’s conversion to a vehemently anti-German line divided the Fascist government and party, with Bottai, Grandi and Balbo in favour of neutrality and Farinacci, Starace and Alfieri supporting the Axis alliance. This division mirrored earlier disagreements within the Fascist party about the soundness

⁹³ See the relevant references in Muggeridge, M. (ed.), *Ciano’s Diary, 1937-1938* (London 1952), 25/26/27.9.1938

⁹⁴ Bottai, *Diario*, 4.2.1939

⁹⁵ Bottai, *Diario*, 9.6.1939

⁹⁶ See the relevant comments in ADAP, D, 6, 52

⁹⁷ On the Salzburg meeting see Ciano, G., *Europa verso il catastrofe* (Milan 1948), pp. 449-59; DDI, 8th, XIII, 1/4/21; DGFP, D, 7, 47; Siebert, F., *Italiens Weg in den Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bonn 1962), Ch. 7; Lowe, C. J., Marzari F., *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London & Boston 1975), pp. 338ff. Cf. Bottai’s opinion in *Diario*, 19.8.1939

⁹⁸ For the proposal see DDI, 8th, XIII, 27. For Ciano’s comments see his *Diaries*, 15.2.1939

⁹⁹ De Felice believed that the decision not to enter the war had already been taken on 15 August. See *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 669ff. For a criticism of this opinion see Knox, “The fascist regime”, pp. 156ff

¹⁰⁰ *Ciano’s Diaries*, 18.8.1939; DDI, 8th, XIII, 162; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 344-5

of allying Fascism with Nazism¹⁰¹. Mussolini kept vacillating, one moment acknowledging Italy's military unpreparedness and Germany's disloyal attitude and the other stating his obligation to honour his commitment towards his Axis partner¹⁰². The King's strong opposition to intervention and the subsequent indignation at the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact strengthened Mussolini's non-belligerence frame of mind and prompted him to write the letter to Hitler explaining Italy's inability to intervene militarily at that stage¹⁰³. Yet, as Ciano himself admitted in numerous occasions during September 1939, the *Duce's* conversion was far from secure - "I do not see him certain yet", he confessed to Bottai as late as on 7 September¹⁰⁴.

Throughout the following autumn and winter the split between Ciano's anti-German line and Mussolini's sentimental attachment to the Axis became increasingly evident. The Foreign Minister's support for the idea of a neutral bloc in the Balkans stumbled upon Mussolini's reluctance to commit Italy to a political formation underpinned by the principle of neutrality and was dropped in December¹⁰⁵. The *Duce* continued to order military preparations - apart from the revival of the "Croat Plan" early in 1940, he placed emphasis on the reinforcement of Libya, a long-term project which had started in the aftermath of the Ethiopian crisis¹⁰⁶. At the Grand Council meeting of 8 December 1939 he gave a gloomy prediction about Italy's prospects in the future - whether the British or the Germans won the war, Italy would

¹⁰¹ Candeloro, G., *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. 9: *Il fascismo e le sue guerre* (Milan 1986), pp. 487ff; Colarizi, S., *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Rome & Bari 1991), pp. 315-9; Bottai, *Diario*, 31.8.1939. On the earlier divisions within the PNF about the Axis see, in this study, Ch. 3, Sections III and IV; Ch. 5, Section IIc

¹⁰² *Ciano's Diaries*, 15.8.1939; Bottai, *Diario*, 31.8.1939; Siebert, pp. 282f

¹⁰³ On the King's arguments see DDI, 8th, XIII, 250/293/298; Mack, Smith, D., *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven & London 1989), pp. 280ff. Mussolini's letter to Hitler is printed in DGFP, D, 7, 271

¹⁰⁴ Bottai, *Diario*, 7.9.1939; *Ciano's Diaries*, 7.9.1939

¹⁰⁵ For the Balkan bloc see Marzari, F., "Projects for an Italian-led Balkan Bloc of Neutrals, September-December 1939", *Historical Journal*, 13 (1970), pp. 767-88; Lowe, Marzari, pp. Ch. 15; *Ciano's Diaries*, 19.9.1939; Quartararo, pp. 527ff; De Felice, R., "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in De Felice (ed.), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 72-4. For the abandonment of the plan see ADAP, D, 8, 266; DDI, 9th, II, 510

¹⁰⁶ DDI, 9th, III, 194; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 53-5; Morewood, S., "Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and Middle East 1935-1940", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M., (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London 1989), p. 192

lose a great part of her political autonomy. However, he alluded to the necessity to intervene at a later stage, when the two sides would be exhausted, and spoke of the need to prepare for the future conflict rejecting Ciano's analysis about the benefits of non-intervention¹⁰⁷. If the Foreign Minister suggested to the British Ambassador Lorraine that the Pact of Steel had essentially been annulled, Mussolini compiled a memorandum later in December, in which he stated categorically that Italy would honour her commitments towards her Axis partner and that a war against Germany was not an acceptable option for Italian foreign policy¹⁰⁸.

The ambivalence of Mussolini's position during the period of non-belligerence reached its peak on the 3rd of January 1940 with the long letter he sent to Hitler¹⁰⁹. The letter reminded the German leader of the priority of an ideological war against the Soviet Union, predicted that Germany could not win the war against the western democracies alone and restated the Italian proposal for a compromise peace with the west. On its own, the tone of the letter reveals Mussolini's disillusionment with the closer contact between Germany and the Soviet Union at the expense of Italy and epitomises the growing doubts of the Italian Fascist leadership about the soundness of the Nazi foreign policy after the Salzburg meeting. For De Felice, this amounted to a reaffirmation of the policy of *peso determinante* and a reminder to the German leadership that Italy was determined to pursue a policy of "open options". It was the culmination of a shift in Italian foreign policy away from Germany and a last-ditch attempt to exploit the channels of communication with Germany to bring the conflict to an end¹¹⁰. Quartararo used Ciano's assessment of the letter as a masterpiece of "wisdom" to interpret it as evidence of Mussolini's non-committal attitude to the European conflict and of the strengthening of Ciano's influence upon

¹⁰⁷ Quartararo, 546ff; Bottai, *Diario*, 8.12.1939

¹⁰⁸ Ciano's *Diaries*, 16.12.1939; DDI, 9th, III, 40; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 66-7

¹⁰⁹ For the letter see DDI, 9th, III, 33; Wiskemann, E., *The Rome-Berlin Axis* (London 1966, 2nd ed.), pp. 225ff; Quartararo, pp. 572ff; Andr , G., "La politica estera fascista durante il seconda guerra mondiale", in De Felice, R. (ed.), *L' Italia fra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 118-20

¹¹⁰ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 669-85; "Alcune osservazioni sulla politica estera mussoliniana", in De Felice (ed.), *L' Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna 1973), pp. 72-4

the *Duce*, rejecting the view that he had already made a definite choice to intervene on the side of Germany¹¹¹.

However, Mussolini's subsequent statements, long before Hitler's reply arrived in March, attest to a diametrically different frame of mind. On 23 January he spoke at the Council of Ministers against neutrality, urging instead the military to mobilise the armed forces for a "parallel war ... against France"¹¹². Although the task of military preparation depended on the import of raw materials and on much-needed foreign exchange from exports, in February he rejected an attractive British trade proposal in favour of a much less beneficial barter agreement with Germany¹¹³. On 1 March he emphatically spoke of the friendship with Germany which prevented Italy from selling weapons to the west¹¹⁴. To Ciano's dismay, Mussolini did very little to avert the imposition of British embargo on Italian trade and continued to talk of an offensive against Yugoslavia as part of the joint Axis struggle against "the democracies"¹¹⁵.

In this sense, the die had been cast before Hitler's reply to Mussolini's January letter arrived in Rome on 10 March, followed by the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop¹¹⁶. Mussolini's declaration to Ribbentrop that Italy would join Germany in the war against the west when military preparations permitted it should not be attributed to a mysterious "conversion" which took place between the first and the second conversation with the German Foreign Minister¹¹⁷. Undoubtedly, as Andr  underlined, Ribbentrop's declaration that Germany's decision to fight against "the plutocratic clique ... is irrevocable" must have strengthened Mussolini's impression that his diplomatic freedom of action had already been severely

¹¹¹ Quartararo, pp. 572-4. Cf. Ciano's assessment in *Ciano's Diaries*, 3/5.1.1940

¹¹² Bottai, *Diario*, 23.1.1940

¹¹³ Lowe, Marzari, pp. 363f; Quartararo, 570-2; *Ciano's Diaries*, 7-8/20.2.1940; DDI, 9th, I, 328 and 3, 30; DGFP, D, 8, 627; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 70ff

¹¹⁴ Bottai, *Diario*, 1.3.1940

¹¹⁵ *Ciano's Diaries*, 22.2.1940; Bottai, *Diario*, 1/2.3.1940

¹¹⁶ On Hitler's reply see DGFP, D, 8, 663. On Ribbentrop's visit see Siebert, pp. 403ff; Andr , pp. 119-20; Di Nolfo, E., "Mussolini e la decisione italiana di entrare nella seconda guerra mondiale", in Di Nolfo, A., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L' Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan 1986), pp. 33-8. For the talks see DGFP, D, 8, 665/667/669; and Ciano, *Europe verso il catastrofe*, pp. 527-41

¹¹⁷ For this interpretation see Siebert, 417f; Andr , pp. 119-20

compromised by the Nazi war initiatives¹¹⁸. Yet, such a strong statement simply magnified Mussolini's previous sentimental predisposition instead of being the primary cause of it. After the meeting he had no illusions about either the German determination to attack France or the proximity of the showdown¹¹⁹. This would inevitably transform the war into an pan-European conflict and, as he had stressed in February, Italy could not "stay out of this drama which will re-make the continent"¹²⁰. Only a few days after the meeting with Ribbentrop, Mussolini summoned Graziani and ordered plans for a "parallel war" in the Mediterranean with defensive preparations in the Alps and an offensive against Yugoslavia¹²¹. At the Grand Council meeting of the 2nd of April he was even more explicit - if Germany attacked France, Italy could not avoid the war but should join "as late as possible" in order to allow time for maximum military preparation¹²².

The remaining period until the official declaration of war on 10 June 1940 was dominated by Mussolini's growing impatience for intervention, magnified by the urgency which the March 1940 meetings with Ribbentrop and Hitler had introduced in his strategic thinking. He continued to contemplate a two-front attack on Yugoslavia (from Croatia and Albania), a plan which Ciano himself was not averse to as it offered the opportunity to realise the long-coveted goal of complete domination of the Adriatic¹²³. The German attack on Norway at the beginning of April caused the widening of the conflict which the *Duce* had always considered as the prerequisite for Italy's intervention¹²⁴. Since he now considered the German army "invincible", he gave orders for the mobilisation of the navy for a *parallel* war in the Mediterranean against British targets¹²⁵. By the end of April, the pace of German

¹¹⁸ On Ribbentrop's comments see DGFP, D, 8, 663/665. See also Andr , G., *La guerra in Europa (10 settembre-22 giugno 1941)* (Milan 1964), pp. 370ff; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 82ff

¹¹⁹ Cf. Ciano's comments in *Ciano's Diaries*, 12/13.3.1940; Bottai, *Diario*, 12.3. 1940

¹²⁰ Bottai, *Diario*, 14.2.1940

¹²¹ DDI, 9th, III, 689

¹²² Bottai, *Diario*, 2.4.1940; Quartararo, pp. 596-7

¹²³ Bottai, *Diario*, 10.4.1940; *Ciano's Diaries*, 10/11.4.1940; Lowe, Marzari, pp. 359ff

¹²⁴ For these comments see his speech quoted in Bocca, G., *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fascista, 1940-1943* (Milan 1997), p. 131

¹²⁵ Bottai, *Diario*, 1.4.1940; DDI, 9th, 4, 37. Cf. previous comments, doubting the capacity of the German armed forces, in *Diario*, 8.12.1939, and in his January 5 letter to Hitler (DDI, 9th, 3, 33; Mack Smith, D., *Le guerre di Duce* (Bari & Rome 1976, 2nd edition), pp. 274f)

advances had overwhelmed him, deepening the rift between him and his Foreign Minister, who continued to view intervention as evidence of Italy's enslavement to the Nazi regime's ferocious will for expansion¹²⁶. Another source of opposition came from King Victor Emmanuel III, who became alarmed at the changing tone of Mussolini's references to Italy's future foreign policy after the meetings with Ribbentrop in March. The King repeatedly singled out Ciano, either personally or through the Minister of the Royal Household Aquarone, for a concerted move to avert intervention¹²⁷. On one occasion, in mid-March, Aquarone even hinted at a monarchical coup d' état with the toleration of Ciano in order to remove Mussolini from power, but Ciano's lack of alternative strategies and his personal loyalty to his father-in-law prevented him from acquiescing to the suggestion¹²⁸. This was the highest point of the anti-interventionist opposition. Ciano continued to give vent to his disappointment with the pro-German orientation of the Italian foreign policy until the end of May but displayed increasing signs of resignation and fatalism¹²⁹. Grandi never concealed his opposition to a war on Germany's side and throughout May he kept warning Rome about the possible implications of intervention in the war¹³⁰. Bottai privately remained a strong supporter of neutrality, but by May 1940 he also resigned to the inevitable and used the *Critica Fascista* to reiterate the official regime justification of Italy's necessary war against plutocratic powers who had imprisoned her in the Mediterranean¹³¹. Balbo made a last-ditch attempt to convince Mussolini not to proceed with the plan to intervene at a meeting on 31 May 1940, but he was frustrated even in his efforts to elicit a slight postponement. He went back to Libya extremely disappointed, but decided to place his loyalty to the *Duce* first and did his best to ensure that the armed forces in Libya were sufficiently prepared to wage war

¹²⁶ *Ciano's Diaries*, 21.4.1940; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 93ff; DDI, 9th, 3, 116

¹²⁷ De Leonardis, M., "La monarchia e l'intervento dell'Italia in guerra", in Di Nolfo, E., Rainero, R. H., Vigezzi, B. (eds.), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)* (Milan, 1986), pp. 39-67; Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, pp. 282ff

¹²⁸ *Ciano's Diaries*, 14.3.1940; De Leonardis, pp. 50-1; Knox, "Conquest", pp. 48-9; Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, pp. 287f. For Ciano's failure to provide a political alternative see Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 46-7

¹²⁹ His resignation is obvious in *Ciano's Diaries*, entries for 11/14/19.5.1940

¹³⁰ Grandi, D., *Il mio paese. Ricordi autobiografici*, ed. by Renzo De Felice (Bologna 1985), Ch. 48

¹³¹ Bottai, *Diario*, 23.4/7.5.1940. See also De Grand, A. J., *Bottai e la cultura fascista* (Rome & Bari 1978), pp. 238-9

against Egypt¹³². As for the King, he reverted to his previous position of passive disagreement, angering Mussolini with his indecision and his initial refusal to delegate control of the armed forces to him, secretly hoping that the west would resist the Nazi attack, but eventually capitulating to Mussolini's demands and succumbing to the latter's warlike drive¹³³.

The only ephemeral glimmer of hope for the anti-interventionist camp came in early May with the *Duce's* declaration that the entry into the war would probably take place after August, since a swift German attack on France was less likely after success in Scandinavia¹³⁴. In a letter sent to Hitler at the end of April, he alluded to a similar date, invoking reasons of military preparation¹³⁵. Events, however, were beyond Mussolini's control and wishful thinking. The Nazi attack on the Low Countries started on 10 May, catching the Italian leadership completely unawares as the news were communicated to Rome only half an hour before the invasion was scheduled to begin¹³⁶. With the impressive advance of the *Wehrmacht* forces all voices of opposition vanished¹³⁷. While Mussolini ordered preparations for a war against France and Yugoslavia, Ciano seized the opportunity to suggest an attack on northern Greece, territorial enlargement of Albania at the expense of Serbia and expansion in north Africa¹³⁸. Also, ironically, the same man who on 7 May had welcomed modest French proposals for a territorial settlement between the two countries, now dismissed the French last-ditch concessions in north Africa as a step taken "too late"¹³⁹. A few days later, Mussolini convoked the Military High

¹³² Segrè, *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 1987), pp. 375-91; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. II: *Lo Stato Totalitario, 1936-1940* (Turin 1981), pp. 823ff

¹³³ De Leonardis, pp. 39-60, pp. 65-7; Ciano's *Diaries*, 21/26.5.1940; Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, pp. 287-8

¹³⁴ Quattararo, pp. 603ff; Ciano's *Diaries*, 22.4

¹³⁵ For the letter see DDI, 9th, 4, 37. Voices of concern about Italy's military preparedness were abundant. See, for example, Badoglio's preference for postponement until 1942 (Bottai, *Diario*, 28.3.1940) and Cavagnari's objections to an early intervention in Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 93-4

¹³⁶ DDI, 9th, 4, 353; Ciano's *Diaries*, 10/11.5.1940; Anfuso, F., *Roma, Berlino, Salò* (Milan 1970), pp. 148f

¹³⁷ Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 52-3

¹³⁸ Bottai, *Diario*, 25.5.1940; Jacomoni, F., *La politica dell'Italia in Albania* (Bologna 1965), pp. 225f

¹³⁹ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 115f; DDI, 9th, 4, 607. For Ciano's earlier comments about the French proposal see Bottai, *Diario*, 7.5.1940

Command and asked Badoglio to complete mobilisation by 5 June¹⁴⁰. Both Badoglio and the Chief of the *Regia Marina* Cavagnari did not question the political soundness of Mussolini's decision but invoked the slow pace of preparation and suggested a postponement until the end of the month, but the *Duce* did not budge from his earlier position. Only Hitler's letter, asking for a slight postponement due to strategic reasons, prompted a reluctant re-scheduling for the 10th. The only effect of Badoglio's concerns was a readjustment of the operational plan, ruling out an initial offensive action against France¹⁴¹.

In the light of this evidence, it is indeed difficult to uphold Quartararo's - and to a certain extent also De Felice's - thesis that Mussolini remained uncertain about his allegiances until May 1940¹⁴². It is true that the Salzburg surprise and the German-Soviet pact of August 1939 angered the *Duce*, who did not take kindly to Italy's relegation to the status of a second reserve of Nazi Germany¹⁴³. His bitterness with this "ideological revision" permeated his letter to Hitler on 5 January which has correctly been interpreted as the highest point in Mussolini's disillusionment with his Axis ally¹⁴⁴. The policy of non-belligerence was intended to restore Italy's freedom of action in the face of the Nazi inclination to treat Italy, as Ciano put it, "like the Romans treated Messinissa"¹⁴⁵. However, even at periods of crisis, the *Duce* never refrained from declaring his adherence to the Axis, arguing like a frustrated ally rather than an undecided neutral or a potential defector¹⁴⁶. Both Quartararo and De Felice confused Ciano's opposition to the Axis with the Mussolini's desire to delay his set decision to intervene on the side of Germany "when we are ... absolutely certain about the victory"¹⁴⁷. It was Ciano who alluded to the invalidation of the Pact of Steel at the same time that Mussolini added references in favour of the Axis to his

¹⁴⁰ Quartararo, pp. 616ff; Anfuso, pp. 147f

¹⁴¹ OO, XXIX, 397; DDI, 9th, 5, 728

¹⁴² Quartararo, Ch. 8. For a discussion of these arguments see Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 36-9; and Knox, "The fascist regime", passim

¹⁴³ André, "La politica estera fascista", pp. 115f

¹⁴⁴ For the first comment see Bottai, *Diario*, 28.8.1939. For the interpretation of the letter see Di Nolfo, "Mussolini e la decisione italiana", pp. 30-3

¹⁴⁵ Bottai, *Diario*, 12.5.1940

¹⁴⁶ Quartararo, pp. 609ff; Di Nolfo, "Mussolini e la decisione italiana", pp. 29-30

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Bocca, pp. 131-2

Foreign Minister's speeches¹⁴⁸; it was Ciano who kept the "secret channel" of communication with the west open until May 1940¹⁴⁹ in the face of the *Duce's* blanket refusal to discuss any conciliatory proposal from either France or Britain in the winter and spring of 1941. Furthermore, Mussolini's determination to postpone intervention as far as possible and his subsequent vacillation about the most suitable date reveal uncertainty about the practicalities of the joint Axis war and not about the orientation of Italian foreign policy¹⁵⁰. As even De Felice conceded, the decision to enter the war was Mussolini's *personal* responsibility, a reaffirmation of his unassailable authoritarian position in a leader-oriented system, taken in the face of opposition from the Monarchy, his Foreign Minister, the leadership of the armed forces, and a number of prominent party *gerarchi* who saw it as a step too far in the misguided alliance of Fascism with Nazism¹⁵¹; it was not, as Quartararo described it, "a decision on the ninety-ninth hour"¹⁵².

This said, Italy's entry into the war was far from the *guerra fascista* which Mussolini had envisaged since 1937 and strove to postpone until 1943 or 1944¹⁵³. His consistent references to "necessity" and "inevitability" of intervention, his urgency to bring the date forward after the invasion of Norway and, especially, after the attack on the west originated from a growing determination to abandon the embarrassing state of neutrality and participate in the re-shaping of Europe¹⁵⁴. The necessity to avoid being relegated to the state of "Switzerland" had been acknowledged by no less a figure of opposition to the Axis as Ciano since the 1st of September, and was reiterated by Mussolini in March and Badoglio later in the spring¹⁵⁵. In this sense, intervention was more *dictated* by the Nazi drive for

¹⁴⁸ Bottai, *Diario*, 8.12.1939

¹⁴⁹ See Quartararo, Ch. 14; DDI, 9th, 2, 217; and 3, 644

¹⁵⁰ For such an analysis see Quartararo, pp. 612-22; De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 762ff; Di Nolfo, "Mussolini e la decisione", pp. 37-8

¹⁵¹ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, p. 844; *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. Ia, pp. 3ff. See also André, "La politica estera italiana", pp. 114-5

¹⁵² Quartararo, p. 624

¹⁵³ Knox, "Conquest", p. 48; Bocca, pp. 126-43

¹⁵⁴ Di Nolfo, "Mussolini e la decisione", pp. 19-25. For the "embarrassing" state of non-intervention in 1939 see Bottai, *Diario*, 31.8.1939

¹⁵⁵ Bottai, *Diario*, 1.9.1939; Pieri, P., Rochat, G., *Pietro Badoglio* (Turin 1974), pp. 735f. Cf. Volpe, J., *Pacifismo e storia* (Rome 1934), pp. 1-5

expansion than *chosen* by Mussolini as the vehicle for launching the real *guerra fascista*¹⁵⁶. His uncertainty regarding the time of the Italian entry into the war and his decision to move the date from 1942 to 1941 and finally to June 1940 reflected how little freedom of choice the frenetic pace of German expansion had left him. In the spring of 1940, especially after the meetings with Ribbentrop and Hitler in March, he realised that this was primarily Germany's war. In April he noted to the press that "our non-belligerence is the result of the fact that this great nation [Germany] has not yet needed us"¹⁵⁷. A few days earlier he also spoke to the Council of Minister about "a war.. (of) six months, because a longer duration could cause grave financial problems; insurmountable"¹⁵⁸. Awareness of structural limitations and acquiescence in the Nazi military initiative convinced Mussolini that a *guerra fascista* in these inauspicious circumstances would be impossible. He, therefore, entered the conflict with a short-term, mainly defensive agenda and in the hope that the main confrontation could be postponed at least until 1942, when Italian military preparation would justify a more ambitious expansionist policy¹⁵⁹. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini decided to give precedence to political considerations and postpone the realisation of his mythical *mare nostrum* plans for the not-so-distant future.

IV. Towards the *guerra fascista*: Mussolini's parallel war in the Mediterranean

Italy's entry into the European conflict took place under conditions that Mussolini had tried to avoid and failed to avert since August 1939. When Badoglio spoke to the other commanders of the armed forces in April 1940, he described

¹⁵⁶ Cf. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 265-6; Bosworth, R. J. B., "Mito e linguaggio nella politica estera italiana", in Bosworth, R. J. B., Romano, S. (eds.), *La politica estera italiana, 1860-1985* (Bologna 1991), pp. 59ff

¹⁵⁷ Araldi, V., *Dalla non-belligeranza all'intervento* (Rome 1961), pp. 116f

¹⁵⁸ Bottai, *Diario*, 2.4.1940

¹⁵⁹ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, II, pp. 807ff; *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. Ia, pp. 92ff. For Mussolini's comments about better chances in 1941 see Bottai, *Diario*, 10.8.1940

Italy's intervention as "on the side of Germany" as opposed to "for Germany"¹⁶⁰. Mussolini's numerous references to the *guerra parallela* after January 1940 underscored his determination to reassert his country's political autonomy in a war that would complement Germany's campaigns in Europe but would also promote Italy's own strategic and geopolitical aims. Therefore, when he was forced to readjust the date of intervention according to Hitler's military *faits accomplis* in the west and to remain on the defensive until France surrendered on 17 June, he could hardly disguise his dejection¹⁶¹. He had hoped at least for an Italian advance to Marseilles but lack of resources and military unpreparedness thwarted his ambition¹⁶². Mussolini's territorial demands against France were accepted by Hitler, in spite of the extremely modest military contribution of the Italian armed forces: free hand in the French African colonies, occupation of French territory up to the Rhône and in the southern coast¹⁶³. Yet, only a few hours later, he alone decided to launch a limited offensive in the Alps in order to achieve a military success which would raise Italy's prestige. The attack did not achieve much, falling short of attaining the minimum target of occupying Nice¹⁶⁴, but by the 22nd the French had already signed the armistice with the Germans. One of the French generals commented to the German delegation that, although "Italy had declared war but not waged it", she would claim more than the Germans for territorial compensation¹⁶⁵. For some mysterious reason they did not. Although the Germans had accepted Italy's territorial goals in Europe and Africa, on the 22nd Mussolini suddenly informed Hitler that Italy would abandon her substantial claims "in the Rhône, Corsica, Tunisia and Djibouti", asking instead for a modest demilitarised zone adjacent to the Italian-French border¹⁶⁶. The armistice signed on the 24th was extremely modest in its

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Bocca, p. 133; Di Nolfo, "Mussolini e la decisione", pp. 36-8

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Ciano's *Diaries*, 17.6.1940

¹⁶² Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 128f; Bocca, pp. 144ff; Mira, G., Salvatorelli, L., *Storia d'Italia nel periodo fascista* (Turin 1964), pp. 1039-46; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 221ff

¹⁶³ For the conditions of the armistice see Rossi, F., *Mussolini e lo Stato Maggiore. Avvenimenti del 1940* (Rome 1951), pp. 168-75; De Felice, R., *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. Ia, pp. 118ff; Bocca, pp. 154-6

¹⁶⁴ See Ciano's frustration in *Ciano's Diaries*, 20/23.6.1940

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Bocca, p. 161

¹⁶⁶ DDI, 9th, V, 76; and Mussolini's notice in 5, 83. See also Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 222-5

claims, surprising even the French delegation¹⁶⁷. When Ciano visited Berlin on 7 July, he tried to resuscitate the Italian claims over Nice, Corsica, Tunisia and east Africa but this time Hitler was adamant in rejecting any new territorial settlement or a separate French-Italian peace before the defeat of Britain¹⁶⁸.

Although the German attack on the British Isles was far from certain at that point, Mussolini hastened to offer his assistance, fearing that the Germans might exclude Italy from a major reorganisation of the European system either by negotiating a separate peace with Britain or by defeating Britain alone¹⁶⁹. His fears were partly confirmed, as Hitler rejected the offer of substantial Italian assistance against Britain. Instead, he urged Mussolini to concentrate on the Mediterranean and Africa, stressing that any strike in Egypt or Suez "is an enormous gain"¹⁷⁰. Furthermore, informed about Ciano's plans for action against Yugoslavia and Greece, Hitler advised caution in the Danubian-Balkan area, pointing to the danger of a Soviet involvement in Rumania and Turkey¹⁷¹. This diversion from Europe to Africa amounted to a polite but plain indication that Germany viewed Mussolini's parallel war as a secondary device of the main Nazi war in Europe. The *Duce* dutifully replied that he would order attacks in east and north Africa so that they would coincide with Germany's launching of Operation Sea Lion¹⁷². The invasion of Britain was for him the definite deadline for any action, as he regarded British defeat inevitable and a prelude to peace¹⁷³. At least, the prospect of a swift peace with Britain dissolved after Hitler's belligerent speech on 19 July and his conversation with Ciano on the following day¹⁷⁴.

¹⁶⁷ For the text of the armistice see DDI, 9th, V, 95; for the French reactions see Rossi, *Stato Maggiore*, pp. 70ff

¹⁶⁸ DDI, 9th, V, 200; DGFP, D, 10, 147

¹⁶⁹ Bottai, *Diario*, 4.7.1940. For Mussolini's assistance DDI, 9th, V, 109 and DGFP, D, 10, 26. For fears of a separate German-British settlement see *Ciano's Diaries*, 28.6.1940

¹⁷⁰ DGFP, D, 10, 166; DDI, 9th, V, 242

¹⁷¹ Conversation between Hitler and Ciano in DDI, 9th, V, 274; and Ciano, *L'Europa verso il catastrofe*, pp. 574-6

¹⁷² DDI, 9th, V, 264

¹⁷³ *Ciano's Diaries*, 18.8.1940; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, 224-5

¹⁷⁴ Hitler's speech in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, 1540-9 (speech to the *Reichstag*, 19 July 1940);. See also Mussolini's assessment of the situation in *Ciano's Diaries*, 22.7.1940

Yet, the Italian successes in Sudan and British Somaliland in the end of July¹⁷⁵ were only a slight consolation for Italy's exclusion from Europe and for lack of progress in Libya. Mussolini's orders for an attack on Egypt in mid-July had been thwarted by the procrastination tactics of the new Italian Commander in Libya, Graziani, who took up Balbo's position after the latter's sudden death in June¹⁷⁶. As indications that the German attack on Britain was imminent at the beginning of August multiplied, the *Duce* decided to step up the pace¹⁷⁷. He ordered Graziani to proceed immediately with the attack on Egypt and at the same time showed an increasing interest in Ciano's project for an invasion of Greece from Albania¹⁷⁸. This last plan gradually became a higher priority than the offensive action against Yugoslavia, which had been prepared since July, as it was now essential to ensure control over the lines of communication between north Africa and southern Europe¹⁷⁹. However, German opposition to any intervention in the Balkans remained a constant of Nazi strategy, as Ribbentrop made clear to Alfieri on a series of conversations throughout August¹⁸⁰. Consequently, the plan had to be postponed in favour of action in Libya, remaining an open option for future action in more favourable circumstances¹⁸¹.

Towards the end of August, however, a sequence of dramatic events started to unfold, transforming the shape of the Axis war and re-dimensioning Italy's importance. On 27 August Mussolini declared that he was happy with the prospect of facing a longer war, possibly lasting beyond the coming winter¹⁸²! By that time, he had been informed of the problems which impeded the German attack on Britain and which Hitler and von Brauchitsch had used as justification for the delay in launching Operation Sea Lion¹⁸³. At the same time, he realised the growing tension between

¹⁷⁵ For these operations see Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 150f; Bocca, Ch. 9

¹⁷⁶ Bocca, pp. 181ff

¹⁷⁷ For these reports by the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Alfieri, see DDI, 9th, V, 357/371/393/411

¹⁷⁸ For the attack on Egypt see DDI, 9th, V, 467. For Greece, see Bottai, *Diario*, 12.8.1940; *Ciano's Diaries*, 12.8.1940; DDI, 9th, V, 386. See also Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 167ff

¹⁷⁹ Bocca, pp. 211ff

¹⁸⁰ DDI, 9th, V, 431/490/506; DGFP, D, 10, 353

¹⁸¹ Bottai, *Diario*, 26.8.1940; DDI, 9th, V, 435/451/484; DGFP, D, 10, 501/538

¹⁸² *Ciano's Diaries*, 27.8/1.9.1940

¹⁸³ DDI, 9th, V, 376/507/516

Germany and the Soviet Union over the control of Rumania, which he interpreted as an opportunity to intervene in the Balkans and restore the balance of power in favour of the Axis¹⁸⁴. While there were indications that the persistent bombardments of the *Luftwaffe* would exasperate the British and might force them to contemplate a peace deal, there was no talk of imminent collapse¹⁸⁵. Neither the *Führer*'s reassurances that the attack would go on as planned nor Ribbentrop's customary optimism in his meeting with the Italian leadership on 19-20 September succeeded in allaying the impression of insurmountable problems¹⁸⁶. Although Hitler officially announced the postponement of Operation Sea Lion on 4 October, the Italian leadership considered the plan dead by 30 September¹⁸⁷. By that time, Italy at last had achieved a first modest but encouraging success at an important sector of the war against Britain - Graziani had bowed to pressure from Rome and advanced to Sidi el Barrani in Egypt¹⁸⁸. This advance had a tremendous psychological effect on Mussolini, offering him the first glimpse of the opportunity to use the German failure in Britain in order to transform this war into an Italian war, a true *guerra fascista*¹⁸⁹. He therefore gave explicit orders to Graziani to continue his advance in Egypt towards Alexandria¹⁹⁰. He was still willing to heed the German advice to avoid disturbances in Yugoslavia due to rising tension in the north Balkans, but he continued to consider an attack on Greece as part of his campaign against Britain in the Mediterranean¹⁹¹. He was in very good humour, as Ciano noted, and kept rejoicing at the possibility of facing a long war, in which Italy would lead the Axis effort against the west¹⁹². He took every

¹⁸⁴ Bottai, *Diario*, 29.8.1940. Cf. DDI, 9th, V, 516

¹⁸⁵ DDI, 9th, V, 582. Cf. *Ciano's Diaries*, 28.8/20 and 22.9.1940

¹⁸⁶ DDI, 9th, V, 602/617; DGFP, D, 11, 68/73/79/87; Hillgruber, A., *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung, 1940-1941* (Frankfurt 1965), pp. 167-78

¹⁸⁷ For the announcement of the postponement see DGFP, D, 10, 149; *Ciano's Diaries*, 4.10.1940. For reports on 30.9 see DDI, 9th, V, 656

¹⁸⁸ USE, *Il Africa settentrionale. La preparazione al conflitto. L'avanzata di Sidi el-Baranni* (Rome 1953); Bocca, pp. 185-6; *Ciano's Diaries*, 14/17/9/1940; Armellini, Q., *Diario di guerra. Nove mesi al Comando Supremo* (Milan 1946), pp. 78ff; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 163ff

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Bottai, *Diario*, 4.7.1940

¹⁹⁰ Armellini, pp. 98-9; *Ciano's Diaries*, 17.9/2.10.1940

¹⁹¹ DDI, 9th, V, 609/634/665; Craveld, L. van, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue* (London 1973), pp. 26ff

¹⁹² *Ciano's Diaries*, 6/30/9/1940; Armellini, pp. 90ff; DGFP, D, 11, 149, esp. p. 254; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 231f

step necessary to ensure that this would be an unmitigated Italian triumph. He and Badoglio rejected the offer of German military assistance for the campaign in north Africa¹⁹³. He also expressed his doubts about German plans for the occupation of Gibraltar (Operation Felix) and tried to ensure that Spain's possible accession to the Axis would not limit Italy's territorial claims or jeopardise her privileged position in the Axis hierarchy¹⁹⁴. Freed from the deadline of the Sea Lion, aware that he had gained the military initiative from Germany for the first time since 1936, he was poised to succeed¹⁹⁵.

Until 12 October, Mussolini's main priority was to set Graziani's forces in Egypt in motion again, overcoming his general's tergiversations and unwillingness to proceed any further. Ciano continued to work on the Greek project but not as an immediate task. This situation changed dramatically, however, after the 12th. The German move into Rumania, without any prior consultation with Italy or invitation for a joint operation, alarmed and angered the *Duce*, who had always been suspicious of German designs in the Balkans¹⁹⁶. On 15 October he summoned his army commanders and declared his determination to occupy "the whole of Greece", a plan he had contemplated for a long time as an integral part of his anti-British strategy¹⁹⁷. To an ecstatic Ciano, who always considered the Greek plan as his own personal project linked to the previous occupation of Albania, he spoke of his decision to confront Hitler with a *fait accompli* in the Balkans and escalate his two-front attack on Britain, in Egypt and the Aegean¹⁹⁸. As Graziani once more rejected demands from Mussolini to proceed and asked for a three-month postponement, Greece acquired the highest priority¹⁹⁹. In his letter to Hitler on 19 October, the *Duce* described Greece as "one of the main points of English [sic] maritime strategy", the

¹⁹³ DGFP, D, 11, 107/149; DDI, 9th, V, 677; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 222-3

¹⁹⁴ For doubts over Gibraltar see DGFP, D, 11, 79; *Ciano's Diaries*, 24.9.1940. For doubts over Spain see DGFP, D, 149 and pp. 166-7; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, Ch. 5

¹⁹⁵ *Ciano's Diaries*, 2.10.1940

¹⁹⁶ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 208f; DGFP, D, 11, 192; DDI, 9th, V, 707/724; Bottai, *Diario*, 12.10.1940; *Ciano's Diaries*, 12.10.1940. For Mussolini's fears of German expansion in the Balkans see DDI, 9th, V, 506/557; *Ciano's Diaries*, 6.9.1940

¹⁹⁷ Bocca, pp. 214ff; DDI, 9th, V, 728. Cf. ADAP, D, 11, 135

¹⁹⁸ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, p. 208; *Ciano's Diaries*, 12.10.1940

¹⁹⁹ Bocca, pp. 258ff; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 208f; *Ciano's Diaries*, 16.10.1940

key to holding the Mediterranean²⁰⁰. With the parallel advancement of Graziani towards Alexandria in the near future, Mussolini continued, Britain would be brought to her knees without the need to lure either France or Spain into the peripheral war. No German assistance was needed until the final confrontation in Cairo - Greece would be overrun within a few weeks, as Ciano had confidently predicted in October²⁰¹.

The radicalisation of Mussolini's attitude to the conflict could not have been more striking. This was not the man who spoke of a short war for a few months, the man who awaited a German triumph as a prelude to negotiations and a compromise with Britain, the man who did not intend to wage a large-scale war²⁰². This was a man who would lead the assault against Britain, who would dictate terms to Nazi Germany and would eliminate every trace of British presence in the Mediterranean, the man who deplored his generals' aversion to war²⁰³. The Mussolini of September-October 1940 was overpowered by hubris, poised to promote his mythical vision of *mare nostrum*, eager to confer upon Italy "the glory she has sought in vain for three centuries"²⁰⁴. If the decision for non-belligerence in 1939 and for a defensive attitude in June 1940 were dictated by what Quartararo termed "realism"²⁰⁵, his two-front offensive action in the autumn of 1940 was decided in total defiance of the advice of his military experts. Apart from Graziani who refused to move prior to the completion of a "convenient military preparation", the three heads of the General Staff and Badoglio backtracked from their acquiescence in the plan in their meeting with Mussolini on the 15th and expressed fears about both the state of the military forces and the feasibility of the operational plan²⁰⁶. However, the *Duce's*

²⁰⁰ The letter is reprinted in DDI, 9th, V, 753; translated in DGFP, D, 11, 199

²⁰¹ Ciano's *Diaries*, 12.10.1940 (and also 29.10); Bottai, *Diario*, 12.10.1940

²⁰² Knox, "The fascist regime", pp. 164-5; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 216ff. Cf. De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. Ia, p. 303; Hoggan, D. L., *Der erzwungene Krieg* (Tübingen 1964), passim, esp. pp. 611ff

²⁰³ DGFP, D, 11, 199, p. 332; Bottai, *Diario*, 19.10.1940

²⁰⁴ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 289ff. The quote from Ciano's *Diaries*, 30.1.1940

²⁰⁵ Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, Ch. 8. Cf. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, vol. I: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1974), pp. 800-2

²⁰⁶ Bocca, pp. 259-60; USE, *La prima offensiva britannica in Africa settentrionale (ottobre 1940 - febbraio 1941)* (Rome, n.d.), vol. I, pp. 45f; Ciano's *Diaries*, 17/18.10.1940; Bottai, *Diario*, 24.10.1940

determination to proceed with his *guerra fascista* was much stronger than any awareness or reminder of military limitations. Badoglio, who by the beginning of the month considered the Greek plan indefinitely postponed, bowed to the inevitable on 18 October without resorting to any of his strategic or logistical arguments²⁰⁷. The attack would go on as planned, with a slight postponement until 28 October. Compared to Ciano's earlier thoughts about a limited operation to seize strategic positions in the north and east of the country, this plan entailed *total* occupation. The ultimatum which would be given to the Greek government would allow neither the time nor the political basis for any negotiations - there was simply "no way out for the Greeks", as Ciano commented on 22 October and Grazzi confirmed to the Greek leader Metaxas in the early hours of the 28th²⁰⁸. As Mussolini himself stated to Hitler in a meeting that took place on the morning of the Italian attack on Greece, emphasis should now be placed on guaranteeing the ultimate victory against Britain²⁰⁹.

V. Launching the Nazi "ideological" war: "Operation Barbarossa"

In spite of his initial frustration with the British declaration of war in early September 1939, Hitler soon regained his self-confidence and the political initiative, especially after the tremendous success of his "lightning" campaign against Poland²¹⁰. By the end of the month he could not hide his impatience for turning against the west immediately and destroying Britain's capacity to resist²¹¹. On 9

²⁰⁷ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 166-7, 191-2, 204-5; Ciano's *Diaries*, 18.10.1940; Bocca, pp. 216-7

²⁰⁸ Ciano's *Diaries*, 22.10.1940; Cervi, M., *Storia della guerra di Grecia* (Milan 1965), pp. 150-1; DDI, 9th, V, 803. Cf. Ciano's previous plan in Bottai, *Diario*, 12.8.1940; DGFP, D, 11, enclosure to Doc. 247. For a good account of the events see Weinberg, G. L., *A World at Arms. A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 208ff

²⁰⁹ DGFP, D, 11, 246, p. 418; DDI, 9th, V, 807

²¹⁰ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1354-66 (speech to Gauleiters, 19 September 1939). For a detailed and interesting history of the German war against Poland see Kennedy, R. M., *The German Campaign in Poland* (Washington 1956); and Bethell, N., *The War Hitler Won. The Fall of Poland, September 1939* (New York 1972)

²¹¹ See, for example, relevant comments in Halder, I, pp. 89-91

October he issued Directive no. 6, in which he stated his decision to launch an offensive war against the western powers without any further delay²¹². His urgency stemmed from what he perceived as an extremely narrow window of opportunity, a favourable international situation, given Italy's support, Russia's inactivity and America's fragile neutrality²¹³. He also warned his generals that an unnecessary prolongation of the war would stretch Germany's limited resources and project an image of weakness to prospective allies and potential enemies. Faced, however, with the opposition of his own *Wehrmacht* generals, who invoked logistical problems regarding the transfer of forces from the eastern to the western front, Hitler was forced to delay the operation until the middle of November and finally to postpone it indefinitely on the 15th due to adverse weather conditions²¹⁴.

During the winter of 1939-1940 the differences in the strategic perceptions of Hitler, the army generals and the navy leadership became evident. The *Führer* continued to refer to the necessity of bringing Britain "to her knees" and destroy her power completely²¹⁵. This prospect alarmed many officials of the *Wehrmacht*, who were desperate to avoid a headlong confrontation with the western powers. With the exception of the servile Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Brauchitsch, most of the other generals feared a repetition of the First World War scenario or expressed doubts about the ability of the German army to beat the western defences²¹⁶. The navy leadership, on the other hand, did share Hitler's strategic principle that the real enemy in the west was in fact Britain but were extremely sceptical of the capacity of the German battleships or U-boats to wage an effective war before the completion of the rearmament programme (scheduled for 1944)²¹⁷. Yet, Hitler continued to view a swift victory in the west and the ejection of the British forces from the continent as the pivotal *sine qua non* before contemplating his next major move. Operation

²¹² For the text of the Directive see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1394ff; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 762

²¹³ Jacobsen, H.-A. (ed.), *Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Westfeldzuges, 1939-1940* (Göttingen 1956), pp. 5-7

²¹⁴ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1418f; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 107ff

²¹⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1426-7 (speech to the generals, 23 November 1939)

²¹⁶ Müller, K.-J., *Das Heer und Hitler, 1933-1940* (Stuttgart 1969), pp. 675ff

²¹⁷ On Admiral Raeder's objections see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1348 (7 September 1939), 1450 (27 January 1940). See also Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 766-7

“Weser Exercise” against Norway in March 1940 was just a pre-emptive strike to secure supply of vital raw materials from Scandinavia and to stave off a British threat from the Baltic Sea²¹⁸. From February 1940 priority had been given to the preparation for Operation Yellow, which would “bring about the decision on land”, remove the threat of a two-front war once and for all, and consolidate Germany’s monopoly of power on the continent “after 300 years of British and French domination”²¹⁹. Early successes in Poland and Scandinavia had strengthened his authority in foreign affairs and overcome the initial doubts of party figures about the advisability of his strategy. Even Rosenberg, a strong advocate of an alliance with Britain until September 1939 and one of the most vehement critics of Ribbentrop’s anti-British arguments, had by early 1940 been converted to the official line of crushing the western powers at any cost²²⁰. The operation against France was hugely successful, with the German troops occupying Paris by 14 June and chasing the British forces out of the continent, although the failure of the German air-force to avert the evacuation of a large portion of the British troops at Dunkirk mitigated the enthusiasm of the Nazi leadership²²¹.

The signing of the armistice with France on 22 June signified the end of the first part of the war against the west and the fulfilment of the strategic preconditions for the attack on the British Isles, as Hitler had emphasised in November 1939²²². Now, the *Führer* had three options for dealing with Britain. First, he could use the triumph of the German forces in the west and the consequent isolation of Britain in order to force the British government to acknowledge the German monopoly in the continent and come to a comprehensive peace agreement which would put an end to a war he never desired. This was the basis of his peace offer to Britain which he

²¹⁸ For the Directive see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1471ff; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 113ff. On Raeder’s importance for the prioritisation of this operation see Gemzell, C.-A., *Raeder, Hitler und Skandinavien* (Lund 1965)

²¹⁹ For the Directive see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1511-12, translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 771-2. For the comments about the significance of the Operation see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1502-3 (Proclamation to the soldiers of the Western Front, 9 May 1940)

²²⁰ Seraphin, *Tagesbuch Rosenbergs*, 23.3/17.6. 1940; Cecil, pp. 184-5

²²¹ ADAP, D, 9, 357/361; Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, I, pp. 319f; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 122-31

²²² See his remarks in ADAP, D, 8, 384

delivered in front of the *Reichstag* on 19 July²²³. Second, he could continue his military pressure on Britain by ordering air raids, intending to cause the collapse of the economic capacity of British industry, demoralise the government and the population, and thus force Churchill to capitulate²²⁴. Third, he could use his airforce to prepare the ground for the invasion of the British Isles and the total destruction of the British Empire.

The first option was ruled out after the official British reply to Hitler's peace offer of the 19 July. Just like in the first peace sounding after the occupation of Poland, when the British government rejected any conceivable compromise proposal by the Nazi regime, Lord Halifax repeated his government's determination to fight against Germany²²⁵. However, Hitler himself appeared not to expect much from his vague, rhetorical appeals to Britain, as three days before the peace offer he had already issued Directive no. 16 for a landing operation against Britain²²⁶. The directive explicitly stated his determination to proceed with the preparation of the invasion and, "if necessary to carry it out", but only as a last resort and after the failure of political and military pressure to induce Britain to accept compromise. On 22 July Hitler reiterated to his army leadership the dangers implicit in the invasion of the British Isles and ten days later, in another meeting with the whole leadership of his armed forces, he did not refrain from expressing "scepticism regarding the technical feasibility [of the invasion plan]"²²⁷. In the meantime, he had encouraged his Axis ally, Italy, to concentrate on a peripheral campaign against British targets in north Africa, especially Egypt and the Suez Canal²²⁸. He appeared to have expected that Britain would yield to diplomatic and military pressure and accept defeat, and

²²³ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1540-1558; Williamson, pp. 61-2

²²⁴ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 151ff

²²⁵ For the first peace offer of September 19, 1939 see Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 92f; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1354ff. The second peace offer in Domarus, II, pp. 1540ff (speech to the *Reichstag* 19 July 1940), and the British rejection, p. 1562

²²⁶ DGFP, D, 10, 177; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1538-9 (16 July 1940), excerpts of which are translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 783-6. See also Wheatley, R., *Operation 'Sea Lion'. German Plans for the invasion of England 1939-1942* (Oxford 1958), pp. 1-15

²²⁷ Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, p. 31-50; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1564-5; Robertson, E. M., "Hitler Turns from the West to Russia", in Boyce, R., Robertson, E. M., (eds.), *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London 1989), pp. 367-82, here pp. 367-72

²²⁸ See, in this chapter, Sections III and IV

did not conceal his bewilderment with the British government's determination to continue fighting²²⁹.

However, towards the end of July, two new options started to crystallise in Hitler's mind. In both expositions he gave to army officials on the 22nd and the 31st of July he attributed the perplexing British refusal to give in to "hopes pinned on Russia and the United States"²³⁰. According to his new analysis, if Germany succeeded in defeating Russia, then both Britain and the USA would abandon hopes for a German defeat and grant a free hand in the continent to the Reich. He, therefore, ordered preparations for a campaign against the Soviet Union to be carried out if the invasion of the British Isles did not take place, preferably in the spring of 1941. Although Hitler's rationale behind this new order pointed to a strategic war against the Soviet Union as secondary precondition for the successful outcome of the campaign against Britain, the *Führer* also described this operation's aim as the destruction of the whole state of Russia with one blow. The second option, which would be an extension of Italy's parallel war in the Mediterranean, involved attacking the British Empire in Gibraltar, Suez, north Africa and the Persian Gulf and "delivering the decisive blow" in the periphery. This plan was initially formulated by the OKM (Navy High Command) and revealed the disagreement of the navy leadership with the preparations for crossing the Channel. The main advantage of the plan was that it could be implemented parallel to the preparations for the invasion of the British Isles and could be given priority if Operation Sea Lion had to be cancelled²³¹.

Undoubtedly, Hitler preferred to establish a permanent settlement with the western powers before turning towards the east, thus avoiding the possibility of a two-front war. Conscious of the importance of establishing air control before any landing was contemplated, he issued Directive no. 17 on 1 August, in which he ordered the *Luftwaffe* to carry out intensive bombing operations and thus destroy

²²⁹ Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 158ff; *World at Arms*, pp. 170ff; Hill (ed.), *Weizsäcker-Papiere*, pp. 204f; Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, p. 30-1. See also Hildebrand, K., *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London 1972), pp. 102ff

²³⁰ Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, pp. 46-8; and for a translation of the relevant excerpt, Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 790-1. See also the discussion in Craig, G. A., *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford 1978), pp. 721ff

²³¹ Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, pp. 43ff; Robertson, "Germany Turns", pp. 373-4; Craig, *Germany*, p. 722

both the military defences and the morale of the population²³². However, the failure to attain these prerequisites had become evident to Hitler by the beginning of September, when the losses of the *Luftwaffe* continued to be high and the British government showed no signs of contemplating surrender²³³. His speech on 4 September included bitter verbal attacks against the British government but refrained from making any concrete references to the outcome of the German operations and the future of the Sea Lion²³⁴. Long before he announced his decision to his Italian ally the *Führer* had come to the painful decision to postpone Operation Sea Lion due to weather problems and the failure to establish superiority in the air²³⁵. Admiral Raeder had realised this failure even earlier and had approached Hitler on the 9th with an emphatic reminder of the Mediterranean option as the only effective means of continuing the war against Britain²³⁶. On 26 September, and encouraged by the postponement of Operation Sea Lion, Raeder gave a more detailed exposition of his Mediterranean project to Hitler. The Admiral stressed the importance of seizing *both* Suez and Gibraltar, while at the same time reinforcing the Italian front in north Africa. He did not conceal his pessimism about Italy's chances of defeating the British alone but expressed his confidence that, with adequate transfers of German troops, the Mediterranean could be "cleared up during the winter months" of 1941²³⁷.

Hitler's foreign policy in the ensuing period until the end of 1940 has given rise to a historiographical debate about his actual intentions and priorities before the final decision to invade the Soviet Union. This debate has revolved around two separate but interrelated questions: first, did Hitler seriously pursue the Mediterranean project as an alternative to the campaign against the Soviet Union;

²³² For the Directive see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1566; Trevor-Roper, H. R. (ed.), *Blitzkrieg to Defeat. Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945* (New York 1964), pp. 36ff. Cf. Hitler's later comments about the importance of controlling the skies before the invasion in DDI, 9th, V, 602

²³³ Collier, B., *The Battle of Britain* (London 1962), pp. 111ff; Fleming, P., *Operation Sea Lion* (London 1957)

²³⁴ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1575ff (4 September 1940). Cf. Ciano's comments in *Ciano's Diaries*, 5.9.1940

²³⁵ Klee, K., *Das Unternehmen 'Seelöwe'* (Göttingen 1948), pp. 204ff

²³⁶ Schreiber, G., "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy in 1940. 'Programme' and Military Planning", in Deist, W. (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington Spa 1985), pp. 254f; Robertson, "Hitler Turns", pp. 376f

²³⁷ See the translated text of Raeder's exposition in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 794-5; and an analysis in Schreiber, pp. 256-8

and, second, when and why did he decide to launch the war of annihilation against his former ally in the east. A group of intentionalist historians, including Weinberg, Hillgruber and Hildebrand, interpreted Hitler's flirtation with the Mediterranean plan as an interim and half-hearted move aimed to elicit the long-coveted compromise agreement with Britain or, at least, to stabilise the front against the British forces²³⁸. According to this interpretation, the *Führer's* interest in the Mediterranean was circumscribed by his unwavering priority to his *Lebensraum* war in the east, the decision for which had crystallised in his mind before the deterioration of the German-Soviet relations in the autumn and winter of 1940-41. However, this thesis has been challenged in two different ways. *First*, Hitler's efforts to bring about a "continental bloc" during the second half of 1940 have been regarded by some historians as wholehearted and insistent, amounting to a real strategic priority to the plan advocated by his Foreign Minister Ribbentrop for the formation of a large anti-British alliance, even with the inclusion of the Soviet Union²³⁹. *Second*, Hitler's plan to attack the Soviet Union remained an open option until his meeting with Molotov in November 1940, or even until Franco's eventual refusal to join the war in December, and was only given priority after November 1940, that is after the mounting tension between Germany and Russia over the control of the Balkans had rendered their mutual alliance strategically unattainable²⁴⁰.

The evidence shows that Hitler did his best to convince the Spanish and French regimes to accede to the anti-British bloc in the second half of 1940. In mid-September he sent a letter to Franco stating the reasons in favour of Spain's entry

²³⁸ See, amongst other works, Weinberg, G. L., "Der deutsche Entschluss zum Angriff auf die Sowjetunion", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1 (1953), pp. 301-18; *World At Arms*, Ch. 4; Hillgruber, A., *Hitlers Strategie und Kriegführung, 1940-41* (Frankfurt 1965); Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich; Deutsche Aussenpolitik, 1939-1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?* (Stuttgart 1970)

²³⁹ For Ribbentrop's idea of a "continental bloc" see Michalka, W., "From the Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop's Alternative Concept to Hitler's Foreign Policy Programme", in Koch (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich*, pp. 267-84; "Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister", in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 165-72; "Die nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik im Zeichen eines 'Konzeptionen-Pluralismus' - Fragestellungen und Forschungsaufgaben", in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 59-62

²⁴⁰ Koch, H. W., "Hitler's Programme and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa'", in Koch (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich*, pp. 285-322; Craveld, pp. 28f, 92ff, 179ff. Cf. Broszat, M., "Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung der Nationalsozialismus", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18 (1970), pp. 392-400

into the war, but the *Caudillo* rejected the German request for the occupation of Spanish ports²⁴¹. At the beginning of October Hitler discussed the plan with Mussolini and on the 20th he travelled to Spain and Vichy France to elicit Franco's and Petain's consent, but again he stumbled on the two leaders' evasive attitude²⁴². In spite of these adverse results, he issued Directive no. 18 on 12 November 1940, in which he reiterated the strategic importance of Spain's participation in the Axis war effort and of the seizure of Gibraltar. He had already given orders for the preparation of this operation, code-named Felix, and he expressed his optimism to the Spanish Foreign Minister Sener that it could be carried out during the following winter if Spain decided in favour of entering the war²⁴³. However, Sener again objected to the German demands for Spanish ports and invoked economic and military problems as the main reason behind Spain's neutrality. Still, lack of a definite negative reply from Franco nurtured hopes in the Nazi leadership that the Mediterranean project was not dead yet. On 5 December Hitler issued new orders for the projected war in the Mediterranean, including Operation Felix with a provisional date for February 1941 and an expected duration of four weeks²⁴⁴. However, Franco's negative reply on 7 December caused considerable consternation to the Nazi leadership and prompted the halting of the preparations for Operation Felix²⁴⁵.

In the following two months Hitler continued to press the Spanish government for a re-consideration of its position, but Franco's continuing resistance forced him to abandon his efforts completely on 22 February 1941²⁴⁶. Yet, since the end of December the Mediterranean project had already been regarded as stillborn, in the sense that it had failed to achieve its main objective, namely the decisive German victory against British forces and targets in the Mediterranean. Not coincidentally, on 18 December Hitler had also issued Directive no. 21 for Operation Barbarossa, which

²⁴¹ DGFP, D, 11, 70/87; Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 307-8; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 177-8

²⁴² DGFP, D, 11, 220/207/227/246.

²⁴³ For Directive 18 see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1609ff; DGFP, D, 11, 323. The talks with Sener in D, 11, 352/357

²⁴⁴ Jacobsen, H.-A., (ed.), *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, vol. I: 1 August 1940- 31 Dezember 1941 (Frankfurt 1965), 5.12.1940 [henceforward, *OKW*]

²⁴⁵ DGFP, D, 11, 476/491; Schreiber, pp. 267-8; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1625; Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*, pp. 178ff

²⁴⁶ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 207-8; DGFP, D, 12, 46/73

stated that the *Wehrmacht*'s main priority would be the defeat of the Soviet Union "even before the conclusion of the war against England [sic]"²⁴⁷.

Even before Franco's negative reply in December 1940, there were indications that Hitler's commitment to the Mediterranean project had specific limits and conditions. First of all, one of the basic tenets of the Axis alliance was the clear delineation of the two partners' *spheres of influence* and the alleged compatibility of their expansionist objectives. According to this tacit agreement, the Mediterranean and Balkan regions constituted Italy's exclusive zone of influence²⁴⁸. Although Mussolini had initially agreed to Hitler's plan for a "continental bloc" with the inclusion of Spain and Vichy France, his general attitude was determined by his desire to stave off any external interference in his own sphere of influence, especially during the conduct of the *guerra parallela* in north Africa. This was the point behind his doubts about France's and Spain's entry into the war that he expressed to Hitler in his letter on 18 October 1940 and again in his conversation with the German Ambassador in Rome, Mackensen, in December²⁴⁹. As we also saw, he refused the offer of German military assistance in the operation against Egypt in September²⁵⁰. Only when the Italian attack on Greece had seriously floundered in the Albanian front and Graziani's troops were on the defensive against advancing British forces in Egypt by early January 1941 did Mussolini allow the German troops to enter the Mediterranean theatre of war and assist in the conduct of the military operations²⁵¹. Yet, by that time, Hitler had given up any illusions about the chances of defeating the British forces in the Mediterranean. His orders underlined the danger of a collapse in

²⁴⁷ DGFP, D, 11, 532; excerpts translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 809-10. See also Schreiber, pp. 268-9; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 187ff

²⁴⁸ Funke, M., "Die deutsche-italienische Beziehungen: Anti-bolschewismus und aussenpolitische Interessenkonkurrenz als Strukturprinzip der 'Achse'", in *ibid.* (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 828-30; Lowe, Marzari, p. 326. On the "compatibility" of the imperialist aspirations of the Axis countries see DDI, 8th, XIII, 13 and 21; 9th, VIII, 117 and 142; and Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, p. 45

²⁴⁹ For Mussolini's initial acceptance of Hitler's plan see DGFP, D, 11, 79/149. For his letter to Hitler, expressing his reservations, see DGFP, D, 11, 192; the conversation with von Mackensen is in D,

²⁵⁰ See in this chapter, Section IV

²⁵¹ Jacobsen (ed.), *OKW*, 8/9.1.1941; DGFP, D, 11, 643; Schreiber, pp. 270f;

the African front and intended to stabilise the Axis positions in the face of the Italian armed forces' incapacity to hold against the British²⁵².

This leads us to the second limit in Hitler's endorsement of the Mediterranean project - his lack of confidence in Italy's ability to defeat the British in north Africa on her own resources. The limited capacity of the Italian forces in Egypt was known to Hitler since July, when he stressed that the Italian contribution to the Mediterranean project would be of limited importance²⁵³. This impression was reconfirmed in September by Raeder, who predicted that the seizure of Suez by Italian troops only would not be feasible, and in November by General Thoma, who inspected the Italian positions in Egypt and conveyed his strong scepticism about the viability of the Italian front in north Africa²⁵⁴. By the time Hitler issued Directive no. 18 on 12 November 1940, he had given up hopes for seizing Suez during the winter, limiting his maximum goals to the seizure of Gibraltar, although the one target without the other cancelled the whole effect of encircling the British forces in the Mediterranean²⁵⁵.

The failure of the Italian *guerra parallela* against Greece and Egypt complicated the situation even further for the German strategic planning and practically annulled the prospects of a decisive Axis victory in the Mediterranean during the winter of 1940/41. However, Hitler appeared much more inclined to rescue the Balkan front from collapse than to intervene in favour of Italy in north Africa. In Directive no. 18 he prioritised the operation in the Balkans but stated that any help in Egypt *could* be authorised only after the Italians had achieved a highly unlikely further advance towards Alexandria. On 13 December he hastened to issue the directive for Operation Marita, intending to occupy Greece by the end of April 1941. It took him another month, during which the British advances on north Africa had decimated the Italian positions, to order the dispatch of additional forces to

²⁵² See his comments in DGFP, D, 11, 487

²⁵³ Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 45ff

²⁵⁴ See Raeder's analysis in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 794-5. For General Thoma's report see DGFP, D, 11, p. 462. See also Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 182ff

²⁵⁵ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1609ff; DGFP, D, 11, 323. Cf. Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 160-1

Egypt²⁵⁶. But this was as far as he would go in order to save the wounded prestige of his Axis partner. He showed no inclination to salvage Italy's east African *Impero* which fell to the British by late May 1941, despite the fact that Ethiopia was supposed to be the base for Axis operations against both the Suez and Sudan-Egypt²⁵⁷. Germany's intervention in Italy's Mediterranean-Balkan sphere of influence followed clear priorities which were meaningful only in the framework of strategic preparation for Operation Barbarossa. The strengthening of Germany's military presence in Rumania in October, the plans to bring Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact in spite of fierce Soviet opposition, and the invasion of Greece in the spring of 1941 were strategic prerequisites for covering the southern German flank against the Soviet Union²⁵⁸. Stabilisation of the situation in north Africa was also significant for the security of southern Europe, especially after the defeats of the Italian armed forces. Ethiopia and Somaliland, on the other hand, were of limited importance only for the moribund Mediterranean project which had already been demoted in Hitler's priorities by the end of 1940.

There is another strong indication that Hitler's Mediterranean strategy in 1940-41 was subordinated to the prerequisites of Barbarossa - the *time factor*. His decision in July to postpone the attack on the Soviet Union until May 1941, with eight weeks of prior preparation, left him with a window of opportunity to tackle the Mediterranean theatre until the beginning of spring 1941. This deadline explains to a great extent Hitler's abandonment of the efforts to lure Spain into the Axis war in late February and the concurrent cancellation of Operation Felix. In his conversation with Suner in November 1940 he had spoken of late winter as the latest possible time for the operation in Gibraltar, envisaging completion by the end of March. During the winter, he kept contemplating the possibility of an action in Spain, but the pacification of the Balkan front after the Italian failure in Greece acquired a higher

²⁵⁶ On the impact of the British counter-attack in Egypt see *Ciano's Diaries*, 11.12.1940, 5/6/7.1.1941. Hitler's orders in DGFP, D, 11, 642; *Ciano's Diaries*, 18/19.11.1940

²⁵⁷ For the collapse of Italian East Africa see Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 282f; Bosworth, R. J. B., *Italy and the Wider World*, pp. 108-9; Bocca, Ch. 16; *Ciano's Diaries*, 30.5.1941

²⁵⁸ DGFP, D, 12, 70/94/108/121; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 187ff. For the strategic importance of Rumania in Hitler's strategic plans for Barbarossa see his Directives 18 and 21 in DGFP, D, 11, 323/899 (and translation of excerpts in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 800-1, 809-11

priority²⁵⁹. The execution of Operation Marita in early spring 1941 necessitated a further slight postponement of Barbarossa, possibly until June, but this would be the latest conceivable deadline. As he had envisaged in July 1940, the complete defeat of the Soviet forces could be completed within three-to-five months; therefore, launching the operation by early summer would leave sufficient time to destroy the Soviet Union before the winter season²⁶⁰.

How important, then, was the attitude of the Soviet Union towards Germany in Hitler's decision to launch Operation Barbarossa in June 1941? Koch has stressed that preparation against Russia had been initiated by the OKW (*Wehrmacht* High Command) before Hitler made his first reference to the need to "crush" the Soviet Union in July 1940²⁶¹. The *Wehrmacht*'s plan was conceived as a reaction to fears of Russian mobilisation on the borders with Germany and entailed a pre-emptive action in case Russian expansion in the Balkans threatened Germany, either directly or by obstructing her position in central Europe²⁶². However, Hitler was adamant in his belief that Russia would not take offensive action against the Reich due to her alleged military and economic weakness, a view he reiterated to his generals in January 1941, that is *after* the definite decision to launch Barbarossa in June²⁶³. Unlike the mainly pre-emptive plan of the OKW, his project was a large-scale offensive action, intended to destroy Russia and force Britain and the USA to acknowledge the German domination of the continent. Interestingly, there was no reference in this speech to Russia's grandiose ambitions in the Balkans and the Baltic states, which Molotov had alluded to in his conversation with Hitler and Ribbentrop in November 1940²⁶⁴. This evidence seems to contradict Koch's analysis of the

²⁵⁹ DGFP, D, 11, 325/511

²⁶⁰ Hancock, E., *The National Socialist Leadership and Total War, 1941-5* (New York 1991), Ch. 2; Clark, A., *Barbarossa: the Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945* (Harmondsworth 1966), pp. 69f; Hillgruber, A., "Das Russlandbild der führenden deutschen Militärs vor Beginn des Angriffs auf die Sowjetunion", in Hillgruber (ed.), *Die Zerstörung Europas. Beiträge zur Weltkriegsepoche, 1914 bis 1945* (Berlin 1988), pp. 256-72

²⁶¹ Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 291ff

²⁶² Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 3ff; Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 291-2

²⁶³ See the relevant references in Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 30ff; and Hitler's speech to the generals in January 1941, in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1652-3 (8-9 January 1941)

²⁶⁴ For the talks see DGFP, D, 11, 325-6/328-9; Craig, *Germany*, pp. 727ff; Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*, pp. 356ff; Schreiber, pp. 263ff. Excerpts of the conversations are translated in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 799ff

developments in the German-Russian relations during November 1940, which identified Stalin's increasing demands for Finland and the Balkans as the primary reason behind Hitler's decision to proceed with Operation Barbarossa²⁶⁵. Undoubtedly, after Molotov's visit to Berlin Hitler could not conceal his disillusionment with the prospects of a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union²⁶⁶. This impression was strengthened by Molotov's reply to the German invitation to enter the Tripartite agreement on 13 November. In his response, Molotov asked for the complete withdrawal of the German troops from the Finnish territory and for an agreement with Bulgaria regarding Russia's access to the Dardanelles Straits²⁶⁷. Although the price asked by the Soviet leadership was high, it stemmed from the generous German concessions which accompanied the Non-aggression pact of 1939 but which the Nazi leadership had decided not to abide by in the critical situation of 1940-41²⁶⁸. Koch regarded this particular document as the catalyst in Hitler's decision to proceed with the preparation for Operation Barbarossa and the real turning point in the re-orientation of Nazi foreign policy towards the east. It seems, however, that Hitler had had few doubts about the viability of the German-Soviet alliance before Molotov arrived in Berlin. Two days before the Russian Foreign Minister's arrival he ordered the preparations for Operation Barbarossa to continue "regardless of what results the talks will have"²⁶⁹. Then, addressing his generals on 5 December, he emphasised his decision to prioritise the operation against the Soviet Union and reconfirmed his initial schedule for an early summer campaign. He did not even have to wait until Franco's negative reply on 7 December to shelve the Mediterranean project.

Undoubtedly, the Soviet leadership bore some responsibility for the deterioration in the German-Russian relations from the summer of 1940 onwards. It was the Red Army who occupied the whole of Lithuania, thus violating the

²⁶⁵ Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 292ff

²⁶⁶ Leach, B. A., *German Strategy against Russia, 1939-1941* (Oxford 1973), pp. 78f; Weinberg, *Hitler, Germany and World War II*, pp. 162-7

²⁶⁷ DGFP, D, 11, 404/405; Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 318-9

²⁶⁸ See the Secret Protocol to the 1939 pact in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1252, and Hitler's subsequent change of mind in Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 304-5

²⁶⁹ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1609f (Directive 18, 12 November 1940); DGFP, D, 11, 323, translated and reprinted in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 800-1

conditions of the Secret Protocol to the 1939 pact with Germany, although a compromise solution was eventually negotiated between the two countries in December 1940²⁷⁰. It was also the increasing Russian interference in the Balkans, with the occupation of Bessarabia and the claims over Bulgaria, that placed the bilateral relations of the two countries under considerable strain²⁷¹. It was also the mobilisation of Russian troops on the border with Germany that first alarmed the OKW leadership and resulted in preparations for a preventive strike²⁷². There is evidence that since the early summer of 1940 the Russian operational plans were based on the assumption that Nazi Germany would be the main enemy and envisaged a German attack in the near future, although it was known to the *Wehrmacht* leadership and to the German Ambassador in Moscow that the nature of this planning was purely defensive²⁷³. However, the real deterioration in the German-Russian relations after Molotov's visit to Berlin resulted primarily from German obstinacy or lack of interest in maintaining a minimum of co-operation. In spite of Russian complaints about the German military occupation of Rumania in October 1940, it was known to Hitler that Stalin did not contemplate any move to obstruct the German action²⁷⁴. At the same time, negotiations for an economic agreement between the two countries came to a fruitful conclusion in January 1941 with extremely beneficial arrangements for the German side²⁷⁵. As the German Ambassador in Russia noted to Ribbentrop, the Soviet leadership were prepared to pay a high price to restore good diplomatic and economic relations with the Reich²⁷⁶. Yet, none of these indications and arguments proved sufficiently strong to effect alterations in Hitler's strategic planning for Barbarossa. This was not a preventive, pre-emptive war, nor a strategic campaign of limited scope and goals. As he stressed to his generals in March, this

²⁷⁰ DGFP, D, 11, 43/168/440/560 for the negotiations, and 579 for the final agreement

²⁷¹ Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 301-7; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 183-5; *Germany and the Soviet Union*, pp. 134f; DGFP, D, 11, 376

²⁷² Koch, "Barbarossa", pp. 312-3

²⁷³ Erickson, "Threat identification", pp. 342-4; Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 113f; DGFP, D, 12, 423

²⁷⁴ DGFP, D, 11, 88/166/170

²⁷⁵ DGFP, D, 11, 568, and 636 for the text of the agreement

²⁷⁶ DGFP, D, 12, 423/468/505/547/628

was going to be a war of total extermination²⁷⁷. His directives for Barbarossa underscored the necessity of mobilising “all available units and resources”, including the reversal of a previous order for partial demobilisation, in order to ensure total success against both the Red Army and the whole Soviet state²⁷⁸.

The launching of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941 constituted the most emphatic affirmation of Hitler’s monopoly of power in foreign policy decision-making. His decision to abandon the war against Britain and concentrate instead on a new target was criticised by prominent figures in both the military and the diplomatic hierarchy of the Nazi regime. The traditional, conservative line of criticism, epitomised by the objections of Raeder, Weizsäcker and Hassell, underlined the danger of a two-front war and questioned the soundness of the decision to attack a non-enemy country with which Germany still had advantageous economic and trade relations²⁷⁹. Others in the army, like Halder, did not express *political* objections to the project but criticised the lack of a clear strategic plan behind the preparations for Barbarossa²⁸⁰. Ribbentrop, on the other hand, initially voiced his reservations about the timing of the operation, pending the formation of the “continental bloc” against Britain and the struggle against the British Empire²⁸¹, but he was eventually persuaded that the war against the Soviet Union would be short and have an extremely positive effect on the campaign against Britain. His personal anti-British strategy, however, had by then been irreversibly shelved, signifying the beginning of

²⁷⁷ See his relevant comments in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1683-4 (Directive for the Liquidation of Russian Commissars, 30 March 1941); Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, 320-37. See also Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 190f. Koch believes that the campaign was both a preventive war and an act of aggression (“Barbarossa”, pp. 319-22). For an assessment of the rather exaggerated “preventive war” theory see Wippermann, W., *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse* (Berlin 1997), pp. 59-79

²⁷⁸ See DGFP, D, 11, 323, p. 527; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 817; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, Ch. 4

²⁷⁹ Schreiber, pp. 268-70; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 190-3; Trevor-Roper, H. R., “Hitlers Kriegsziele”, *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte*, 8 (1960), pp. 127f; Hassell, U. von, *The von Hassell Diaries* (London 1948), 1.9.1939; Schöllgen, G., *A Conservative against Hitler. Ulrich von Hassell, Diplomat in Imperial Germany, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, 1881-1944* (Basingstoke & London 1991), pp. 67ff. For Weizsäcker’s memorandum containing strong critical comments see DGFP, D, 12, 419. For Canaris’ objections see Streit, C., *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941-1945* (Stuttgart 1978)

²⁸⁰ See, for example, Jacobsen (ed.), *Halder*, II, pp. 257-261

²⁸¹ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, p. 193; Michalka, “From the Anti-Comintern Pact”, pp. 283-4

his declining influence upon Hitler in the remaining years until 1945²⁸². As for Goering, his reservations again stemmed from logistical considerations, since both war production and rearmament had not yet reached the projected optimal level. Instead, he emphasised the need to concentrate all available resources against Britain and then refrain from further large-scale expansion in order to “digest” the vast resources of the occupied areas²⁸³. As, however, had happened in all the other cases of his disagreement with Hitler, he placed his loyalty to the *Führer* first and participated in the preparations. Only Rosenberg and the SS leadership understood from the first moment the ideological implications of the war and endorsed the effort wholeheartedly²⁸⁴. Rosenberg was ecstatic about Operation Barbarossa, regarding it as a return to the ideological core of Nazism and a historic opportunity to defeat Bolshevism and the Jews²⁸⁵. Himmler was equally jubilant, not only for the ideological significance of the undertaking but also for the opportunities it offered to his SS for wider responsibilities and jurisdictions. In 13 March 1941 Hitler personally granted extensive powers to SS units in the Nazi empire, allowing them “to act independently and under [Himmler’s] responsibility”²⁸⁶. Himmler himself could not conceal what was at stake in this operation. In a speech to SS units on the day that Operation Barbarossa was launched he stressed that this war was the beginning of a fundamental reorganisation of Europe and the whole world²⁸⁷.

²⁸² Michalka, W., “From Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop’s Alternative Concept to Hitler’s Foreign Policy Programme”, in Koch, H. W. (ed.), *Aspects of the Third Reich* (Houndmills & London 1985), pp. 281ff; “Die nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik im Zeichen eines ‘Konzeptionen-Pluralismus’ - Fragestellungen und Forschungsaufgaben”, in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 55-62

²⁸³ A very good analysis of Goering’s arguments may be found in Overy, *Goering*, Ch. 5, esp. pp. 190-1

²⁸⁴ See Rosenberg’s plans for the administration of the eastern provinces in DGFP, D, 12, 649; Hancock, pp. 29ff; Wegner, B., “‘My Honour is Loyalty’: the SS as a Military Factor in Hitler’s Germany”, in Deist, W., (ed.), *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (Leamington, Spa 1985), pp. 220-39; Fest, J., *The Face of the Third Reich* (London 1972), pp. 171-90; Ackermann, J., *Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen 1970); “Heinrich Himmler: Reichsführer - SS”, in Smelser, R., Zitelmann R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 98-112

²⁸⁵ Seraphin, *Tagesbuch Rosenbergs*, entries for 29.5/21.6.1941; Cecil, pp. 187ff

²⁸⁶ The Directive is discussed in Manvell, R., Fraenkel, H., *Heinrich Himmler* (London 1965), pp. 113ff

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Rhodes, J. M., *The Hitler Movement* (Stanford 1980), pp. 119

As Hitler stated in his letter to Mussolini on the day of the invasion, this war was a return to his ideological origins and concepts, which at last had set him “spiritually free”²⁸⁸. In taking his decision he had contradicted his two pivotal long-term strategic principles - agreement with Britain, avoidance of a war on two fronts (or three, in this case, with the inclusion of north Africa). However, here lay the essence of the ideological nature of this war: namely, that it was launched in total defiance of material, structural and strategic considerations, with an unjustified confidence in swift victory which stemmed from an ideologically-driven underestimation of Russian power, and against the counsel of his most senior military and diplomatic advisors. At exactly this point in the history of the Nazi war Hitler abandoned his previous tactical flexibility, gave up his efforts to produce optimal preconditions for the attainment of his *Lebensraum* vision, and retreated irreversibly into the mythical sphere of his worldview.

VI. The path to defeat: the end of the fascist war (1941-45)

Leaders and the monopoly of foreign policy-making in war

So, the “fascist” war entered its most crucial stage, first for Italy in the autumn of 1940, and then for Germany in the summer of 1941. However, the monopolisation of the responsibility for decision-making by the two leaders remained a source of weakness for the two systems’ capacity to wage an effective war. It is crucial to examine how effectively the two fascist systems combined the notion of “charismatic leadership” with the task of managing diverse national resources in pursuit of their respective war objectives. This was the first area where the interplay of long-term ideological features and structures greatly determined the fate of the two countries’ war effort. On a number of occasions the ideological and political preconceptions of the two fascist leaderships were found incompatible with notions of co-ordination, diplomatic flexibility and effective sharing of authority which characterised modern foreign policy-making and warfare. However, the triumph of the “authoritarian” concept in the decision-making process of the two regimes diminished the possibility

²⁸⁸ DGFP, D, 12, 660; *Ciano's Diaries*, 22.6.1941

of a well co-ordinated domestic organisation of resources and of a rational division of responsibilities²⁸⁹. War accentuated these pre-existing tendencies and impeded a more effective exploitation of resources, a more pragmatic redefinition of goals, and the adoption of a more sound overall strategy for the war.

Undoubtedly, the principle of “charismatic leadership” proved to be the strongest element of integration and cohesion within the fascist states²⁹⁰. However, it gradually became a major cause of the two systems’ dysfunctionality. The determination of the two fascist leaders to concentrate absolute responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy and, later, war in their hands eliminated the regimes’ capacity for rational policy-making. In Italy, Mussolini imposed his wishful thinking on his military and diplomatic advisors, in spite of their opposition to his reckless, uncoordinated strategy. Yet, as Balbo had predicted since 1936, he fell prey to his own image of the “infallible” leader (*Mussolini ha sempre ragione*)²⁹¹. Mussolini’s assumption of total authority in both the political and military decision-making process during the war produced a decision-making process which gravitated dangerously towards his personal “charismatic” authority. He showed little inclination to heed the advice of prominent political and military figures. Neither the pleas of his foreign Minister, Ciano, for a more restrained policy towards Germany between August 1939 and May 1940, nor the explicit reservations of the King for Italy’s intervention in the war prompted him to re-assess his decisions. He also stubbornly avoided any devolution of authority to his military leadership. Despite the military soundness of appointing a Supreme Commander to co-ordinate the three arms of the armed forces, he refused to promote Badoglio to this position, fearing such a concentration of power and mistrusting his Marshal’s intentions²⁹². He believed that political will was a sufficient guarantee for the successful execution of

²⁸⁹ See, in this study, Ch. 3

²⁹⁰ Michalka, “Die nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik”, in Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, pp. 46ff; Nyomarkay, J., *Charisma and Factionalism in the Nazi Party* (Minneapolis 1967), Ch. 6; Gentile, E., *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista* (Rome & Bari 1993), pp. 261-97

²⁹¹ Segrè, *Balbo*, pp. 340-1

²⁹² Whittam, p. 80; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 17, 57; Rochat, “Mussolini e forze armate”, pp. 130-2; Ceva, L., “Appunti per una storia dello Stato Maggiore Generale fino alla vigilia della ‘non-belligeranza’ (giugno 1925-luglio 1939)”, *Storia Contemporanea*, 2 (1979), pp. 207-52

military plans and perceived the military leadership as disposable²⁹³. He refrained from drafting an overall plan for the army's strategic goals to allow for a more rational distribution of resources between the African, the Balkan and the Mediterranean fronts. Instead, he resorted to an unnecessary and imprudent promiscuity of objectives, constantly shifting priorities and targets. In the summer and autumn of 1940 he kept oscillating between the plans for an attack against Yugoslavia and for a campaign against the northern part of Greece, while avoiding fixing the date of the operations in north Africa and the Balkans²⁹⁴. Lack of strategic planning proved fatal, both in Greece and in Libya, but the failures were interpreted by Mussolini as an indication of his generals' inability to comprehend the spirit of Fascism²⁹⁵. At the most crucial stage in Italy's *guerra parallela*, in December 1940, he decided to force Badoglio to resign and replaced him with the much more servile and a-political figure of Cavallero²⁹⁶. Cavallero was the right choice in the sense that he could still nurture his leader's ambitions with his unjustified optimism about the prospects of the campaign against Greece. He was also willing to execute Mussolini's hysterical orders for attack in December and again March, in spite of objective logistical problems²⁹⁷. Yet, as Bottai wrote in his diary in December 1940, after the situation in all fronts had deteriorated to a critical point, this was a deep "crisis", not just in military terms but primarily on a political level, a crisis of the whole system²⁹⁸.

In Germany, the "Hitler-state" left no room for active opposition to the leader's opinion²⁹⁹. Those acting under the direct authorisation of the *Führer* could

²⁹³ On these views see *Ciano's Diaries*, 21/22/27.11.1940; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 121f; Bottai, *Diario*, 30.11.1940

²⁹⁴ On the "wait-and-see" policy towards Greece and Yugoslavia see DDI, 9th, V, 467. See also André, G., "La politica estera fascista durante la seconda guerra mondiale", in De Felice (ed.), *Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati*, pp. 122-6

²⁹⁵ Colarizi, *Opinione pubblica*, pp. 345-8

²⁹⁶ On Ciano's negative assessment of Cavallero see *Ciano's Diaries*, 29.4.1942. For the replacement of Badoglio see Bocca, pp. 248ff; Armellini, p. 246; *Ciano's Diaries*, 4.12.1940

²⁹⁷ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 245f; *Ciano's Diaries*, 7/18.12.1940, 16.1.1941

²⁹⁸ Bottai, *Diario*, 13.12.1940

²⁹⁹ Hildebrand, K., "Monokratie oder Polykratie?", in Hirschfeld, Kettenacker (eds.), *Führerstaat*, pp. 73-96; Bracher, K. D., "The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation", in Laqueur (ed.),

by-pass bureaucratic processes and ignore hierarchies. The Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, constructed a mobile and highly personal Foreign Office which issued orders without the prior consultation of the *Wilhelmstrasse* bureaucracy³⁰⁰. Himmler and the SS had the luxury of carrying out the “ideological” aspects of the total war (i.e. extermination policies), despite the opposition from military leaders based on doubts about the rationality of such an enterprise³⁰¹. Bormann gradually gained special access to Hitler and thus increased the emphasis of the “ideological” character of the war at the expense of rational economic planning³⁰². Speer, the architect of the rationalisation of German war economy in 1941-3, became powerful with the support of Hitler, but was gradually overshadowed and side-lined, when the *Führer* changed his mind in 1943-4 and accepted the arguments of the party hard-liners³⁰³.

The spectre of defeat after 1942 signified a decisive strengthening of the authority of the party at the expense of state institutions and bureaucracies. According to Hitler, the NSDAP was a guarantee of “victory-minded mentality”, a quality which was in short supply amongst the bureaucrats and the generals of the

Fascism, p. 198. Even the most vehement anti-intentionalist endorses the idea that Hitler was the central element in the decision-making process of the Third Reich, especially in the field of foreign policy: Mommsen, H., “National Socialism: Continuity and Change”, in Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism*, pp. 152ff

³⁰⁰ Michalka, W., “Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister”, in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (Houndmills & London 1993), pp. 165-72; Broszat, M., *The Hitler State. The Foundation and Development of the internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London & New York 1981), pp. 296ff; Fest, J., *The Face of the Third Reich* (London 1970), pp. 175-86, Seabury, P., *The Wilhelmstrasse. A study of German diplomats under the Nazi regime* (Berkeley 1954), Chs. 7-8

³⁰¹ For the reactions of military leaders to the SS operations in the east see Browning, C. R., *The Path to Genocide. Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge 1992), pp. 74-5; and Herbert, U., “Arbeit und Vernichtung: Ökonomisches Interesse und Primat der ‘Weltanschauung’ im Nationalsozialismus”, in Diner, D. (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?* (Frankfurt 1987), pp. 216ff. See also Goebbels’ criticism of the “ideological” activities of the SS-SD (i.e. evacuation of the Jews) during the most crucial part of the Eastern campaign, in Lochner, 6.3 and 25.5.1943. Generally, on Himmler’s ideas and the SS ideology see Fest, pp. 111-24; Orlow, D., *The History of the Nazi Party* (Pittsburgh 1973), vol. II, pp. 57, 181; Ackermann, J., *Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen 1970); and *ibid.*, “Heinrich Himmler: Reichsführer - SS”, in Smelser, Zitelmann (eds.), *Nazi Elite*, pp. 98-112

³⁰² Orlow, II, pp. 326ff, 422ff. See also Goebbels’ criticism of Bormann’s policies regarding the eastern front in Hancock, pp. 109-10, and in Trevor-Roper, H., (ed.), *The Goebbels Diaries: Final Entries 1944-1945* (London 1988), 16.4.1944.

³⁰³ Hancock, Ch. 8; Orlow, II, 434ff. On the role of Speer in the early 1940s see Dülffer, J., “Albert Speer: Cultural and Economic Management”, in Smelser, R., Zitelmann, R. (eds.), *The Nazi Elite*, pp. 211-23; Herbst, L., *Der totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft. Die Kriegswirtschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Ideologie und Propaganda 1939-1945* (Stuttgart 1982)

armed forces³⁰⁴. This shift towards the party entailed the transfer of a vast range of responsibilities from the state to party organisations or individuals. The Gauleiters continued to report directly to Hitler about the situation in their provinces, and there was no co-ordinated policy at national level³⁰⁵. Ribbentrop's Foreign Ministry had to wage an enormous - and losing - battle against both the Ministry of Propaganda and the SS for the control of the occupied areas³⁰⁶. The pace of nazification of the armed forces was significantly accelerated after 1943 with the introduction of the institution of Commissioners³⁰⁷. At the same time, the *Führer* continued to concentrate even more authority in his hands, both in the shaping of the policies and in the conduct of the war effort. He even blamed the failure of the German offensive in Russia on the military leadership and assumed supreme command of the armed forces in December 1941³⁰⁸ after dismissing his Commander-in-Chief of the Army Brauchitsch. Distrust of the abilities of his subordinates³⁰⁹ and excessive confidence in his own capacity to regulate such an immense system, prevented him from considering the advice of his party colleagues, his military specialists and the diplomats. Undoubtedly, his failure to effectively supervise the war effort alone made him increasingly dependent on a distorted, limited view of the events. Yet, he refused to admit failure in his own strategy, despite warnings from those immediately involved in the conduct of the war³¹⁰. This tendency became most clear in the eastern front after 1941³¹¹. He brushed aside the advice of the *Wehrmacht* leadership in August 1941 to proceed to the occupation of Moscow, ordering instead advances in the north sector of the

³⁰⁴ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1967f (address to the nation, 1 January 1943)

³⁰⁵ Hancock, p. 195

³⁰⁶ Seabury, pp. 123-4, 126ff; Orlow, II, pp. 403-4

³⁰⁷ For the attempts of the Nazi party to "nazify" the armed forces see Berghahn, V. R., "NSDAP und 'Geistige Führung' der Wehrmacht", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 17 (1969), pp. 49f

³⁰⁸ Broszat, *Hitler State*, pp. 294f; Hancock, p. 190, where Guderian's criticism is also stated. See also Noakes, Pridham, *Nazism*, III, pp. 828-9; Geyer, "Restorative Elites", p. 144

³⁰⁹ Hitler's gradual disillusionment with the *Wehrmacht* leadership, leading to contempt and anger, has been well recorded in the entries of Goebbels' diaries. See Lochner, e.g. 20.3.1942, 9.3.1943, 10.5.1943

³¹⁰ See his comments in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 829-30. On the psychological reluctance of Hitler and the German soldiers in general to admit defeat see Geyer, "Restorative Elites", pp. 157ff; Bartov, O., "Savage War", in Burleigh, M. (ed.), *Confronting the Nazi Past. New Debates on Modern German History* (London 1996), pp. 129ff

³¹¹ Browning, pp. 111ff; Burrin, P., *Hitler et les juifs: Genèse d'un Genocide* (Paris 1989), pp. 155f

front³¹². He also rejected the appeals of the generals for a strategic retreat in the winter of 1941/42, issuing directives to all army groups in the eastern front to defend the occupied territory because “withdrawal would produce a crisis of confidence in the leadership”³¹³. A similar inability to contemplate tactical withdrawal in the face of adversity led him to overrule Rommel’s defensive strategy in north Africa and order his troops to stand firm in their positions. The result was that, by May 1943, the last German forces in Tunisia had surrendered after having suffered tremendous human and material losses³¹⁴.

Lack of administrative co-ordination significantly aggravated the situation by destroying the channels of communication between the various authorities within the regime. There was no real co-ordination between the military activities of the SS and the strategy of the *Wehrmacht*. Himmler, as the leader of the SS and Hitler’s close associate, was in a position to impose policies for the eastern front which infringed the jurisdiction of the military leadership³¹⁵. Even within the circle of Hitler’s associates divergent concepts of strategy emerged. The very idea of “total war” held a different meaning for Speer (rational policy based on maximum economic efficiency), for Goebbels (the first step towards a long-term exploitation of the conquered regions and populations), and for Bormann or Himmler (the culmination of the regime’s teleological visions)³¹⁶. Hitler himself wavered: in 1940-2 he supported Speer wholeheartedly, but failures from 1943 onwards induced him to radicalising, rather than rationalising and limiting, his goals. It is questionable whether he was aware that the war had been lost by 1943³¹⁷, and in any case he was determined to maintain the fight until the very end. Yet, by that time, the domestic system had reached a critical point of paralysis. After such a long time of “Hitler-myth” propaganda, the Nazi system was unable to consider alternatives to Hitler’s

³¹² Jacobsen (ed.), *OKW*, pp. 1062-3; DDI, 9th, VIII, 211

³¹³ Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1812-6 (19 December 1941); Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 827-8; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, Chs. 5-6

³¹⁴ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 431-47; Howe, G. F., *Northwest Africa. Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington 1957); Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 846-8

³¹⁵ Wegner, “My Honour is Loyalty”, pp. 230ff; Orlow, II, Ch. 7

³¹⁶ On the different conceptions of total war within the Nazi leadership see Hancock, pp. 191f. See also Speer’s definition of “total war” in Lochner, 29.9.43; and Goebbels’ insistence on a more systematic pursuit of “total war” goals in DDI, 9th, X, 39; Remak, pp. 90-2

personal strategy, to react to the self-destructive policies of the leadership, and to actively seek an alternative to the impending destruction³¹⁸. The 20 July 1944 plot was the ultimate proof that it was impossible to change the course of Nazi policy with Hitler still in charge. In contrast to what happened in Fascist Italy, however, when defeat became apparent, allegiance to the *Führer* remained a powerful factor of the Nazi regime until the very end. Most Nazi officials remained loyal to their leader, while those who, like Goering and Himmler, sought to replace him in the last months before collapse, were effectively thwarted in their plans by Hitler and his faithful entourage³¹⁹.

International co-operation: an uncoordinated war

Domestic co-ordination was just one prerequisite for the effective management of the war by the two fascist regimes. Since the war of 1939-1945 was intended to be an Axis *joint* campaign for an overall “new order”, the question of political and military co-ordination in the framework of the Axis alliance complemented the task of domestic preparation and co-ordination in each fascist country. The internationalisation of fascism had been a fact long before the outbreak of war, first by the alliance between Germany and Italy, and then by the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Tripartite Agreement with Japan³²⁰. This prepared the ground for an international crusade of the fascist states against both the western powers and the Soviet Union. Spheres of influence had been defined among the Axis partners before 1939: central Europe and Russia for Germany, Mediterranean and parts of Africa for Italy, the Pacific Ocean for Japan³²¹. The geographical extent of

³¹⁷ Speer, A., *Inside the Third Reich* (London 1970), pp. 404-5

³¹⁸ Goebbels himself had acknowledged that there is no chance for active opposition to Hitler in the framework of the regime. See Trevor-Roper, *Final Entries*, 2.6.1944

³¹⁹ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, pp. 485-7; Hansen, R., “Aussenpolitik im Zusammenbruch des Dritten Reiches”, in Funke, M. (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte. Materialien zur Aussenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Düsseldorf 1977), pp. 128ff

³²⁰ On von Ribbentrop’s early ideas about a “world triangle”, encompassing Germany, Italy and Japan, see Michalka, W. (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich*, I, pp. 241ff. On the actual Tripartite Agreement see DGFP, D, 11, enclosure to Doc. 109; DDI, 9th, V, 649; and Michalka, *Dritte Reich*, vol. II: *Weltmachtanspruch und nationaler Zusammenbruch 1939-1945*, pp. 50f

³²¹ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, p. 837; Funke, “Die deutsche-italienische Beziehungen”, pp. 828-30; Lowe, Marzari, p. 326. On the compatibility of the imperialist aspirations of the Axis

these aspirations and their political implications (i.e. conflict with Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union) had rendered the task of co-ordination among the Axis partners indispensable for the success of the fascist new territorial order.

We have already examined the factors which undermined the prospects of such a co-ordination prior to the outbreak of the war³²². During the war, co-ordination seemed possible on the basis of mutual respect between the two partners. So long as Germany refrained from impressive initiatives and consulted the Italian leadership in the shaping of war policies, Mussolini was prepared to take into account German advice. When, however, in October 1940, German forces were transferred to Rumania without prior consultation with the Italian leadership³²³, the Duce's wounded prestige shattered the hopes for a long-term harmonisation of Axis strategy. Against any notion of military rationality and co-ordination, the Italian leadership embarked upon the plans for an attack on Greece. The operation was prepared inadequately, upon the arbitrary assumption that it would be short and painless without considering the negative impact of such a diversion of resources from the north African front³²⁴.

Politically, the attack on Greece was a *tour de force*, in the sense that it caught the German leadership unawares and raised the stakes of Italy's war³²⁵. In military terms, though, it proved to be an utter disaster. The Albanian front became the first battleground in which Axis forces were forced to a humiliating retreat. The negative consequences, however, of the reversal of Italian fortunes in Greece were not confined to this particular theatre of operations. Priority in the allocation of military resources to the rescue of the Balkan front resulted in serious limitations on the assistance dispatched to Graziani in Libya, in spite of the latter's repeated warnings that the north Africa forces were not sufficiently equipped to face the British

countries see DDI, 8th, XIII, 13 and 21; 9th, VIII, 117 and 142; and Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II*, p. 45

³²² See, in this study, Ch. 5

³²³ DGFP, D, 11, 192; DDI, 9th, V, 676 and 707; Noakes, Pridham (eds.), III, pp. 798-9

³²⁴ Sadkovich, J. J., "The Italo-Greek War in Context: Italian Priorities and Axis Diplomacy", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993), pp. 493-64

³²⁵ Hitler remained calm during the meeting with Mussolini in Florence on 28.10.1940 [Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1600], but the news of the Italian attack on Greece caused him irritation and anger [von Kotze, H., (ed.), *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler, 1938-1943. Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel* (Stuttgart 1974), p. 88, quoted in Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 229-30.

troops³²⁶. The details of the fate of the Italian “parallel war” need not be recounted here³²⁷. In the morning of 12 November British forces attacked the Italian fleet at the southern port of Taranto, inflicting extensive damage on the new Italian battleships which were supposed to lead the campaign of the *Regia Marina* against the British fleet in the Mediterranean³²⁸. While the situation in Greece showed no signs of improvement, at the beginning of December the British troops in north Africa assumed the offensive and forced Graziani’s forces to a steady retreat, first out of Libya and, by the end of January, also out of Cyrenaica³²⁹. Mussolini’s misplaced hopes for a reversal of the situation in all fronts were quickly frustrated. By the early spring of 1941, the Italian armed forces had been defeated in north-western Greece and were steadily retreating both in Libya and in Sudan. The remaining prestige of the Italian fascist regime was shattered after Germany took over the first two operations and succeeded where Italy had so dramatically failed. It took the German armed forces a little more than a month to occupy Yugoslavia and Greece, while the joint German-Italian forces in north Africa resumed the offensive under the command of General Rommel³³⁰. No German interest existed in the E. African front, where the Italian troops fought their hopeless campaign unaided until they were overpowered by the British forces in May 1942. Mussolini’s war, as an alternative, autonomous enterprise, was dead, and the Italian failure was irreversible, after the heavy human and material losses drastically reduced the fighting capacity of the Italian armed forces. From that point, Germany conducted her own war and enjoyed

³²⁶ Sadkovich, “The Italo-Greek War”, pp. 440ff; “Of Myths and Men: Rommel and the Italians in North Africa”, 1940-42”, *International History Review*, 13 (1991), pp. 287-301

³²⁷ See De Felice, R., *Mussolini l’alleato*, vol. 1a: *Dalla guerra ‘breve’ alla guerra lunga, 1940-1943* (Turin 1990), pp. 28ff; Sadkovich, J. J., “Understanding defeat: reappraising Italy’s role in World War II”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989), pp. 27-61; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 231ff

³²⁸ See Bocca, pp. 231-3; USM, *La marina italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, vol. 4: *La guerra nel Mediterraneo* (Rome 1959), pp. 200ff; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 236ff; *Ciano’s Diaries*, 12.11.1940; Bottai, *Diario*, 14.11.1940

³²⁹ Bocca, pp. 261-9; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 251ff; USE, *La prima offensiva britannica in Africa settentrionale*, I. See also the repercussions of the reverse in Libya in *Ciano’s Diaries*, 10/11/12/15.12.1940; 5/22.1.1941

³³⁰ Bocca, Ch. 14 (Africa), and pp. 295-304; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 225-34 (attack on the Balkans), 348-63 (German offensive in north Africa); Sadkovich, “Of Myths and Men”, pp. 287ff. Hitler underlined the importance of helping the Italians win the war in the Balkans before “Barbarossa” [Domarus, Hitler, II, p. 1664 (30 January 1941)]. For Romel’s successes see DDI, 9th, VIII, 645/ 658/ 694; IX, 21; Lochner, 24.1, 7.2, 16.12.1942,

the whole prestige of Axis victories in Europe and Africa. This was reflected in the military planning of the Axis from 1941, where Italy ceased to be referred separately as a military force, and was placed as second in the "German-Italian war"³³¹. Mussolini deeply resented the relegation of Italy's role in the Axis alliance and continued to be jealous of the successes of his German allies. In private he even expressed hopes that Germany's victory in Europe would be difficult and painful³³². He was, however, aware that in his alliance with Germany there was no way back or out, and resigned to the fact that the window of opportunity for Italy's great power aspirations had been shut in the early months of 1941. When Ciano was replaced as Foreign Minister in early February 1943, Mussolini thanked him for his services, agreeing with his son-in-law that the impending defeat was the result of Germany's unilateral hasty initiatives and her refusal to consult the Italian leadership in the formulation of the Axis war's strategy³³³. Neither, however, the collapse of the war in Russia in 1943 nor the invasion of Sicily would make him consider alternative policies to his alliance with Germany.

Lack of co-ordination within the Axis alliance also diminished the prospects of a German victory. The intervention in the Balkans caused problems and delays to the launching of Operation "Barbarossa" which proved fatal in the long-term³³⁴. At the same time, although the Japanese government had initially expressed its intention to assist the German campaign in the Soviet Union, it was subsequently put off by the poor performance of the Wehrmacht and refused to co-ordinate with Germany in a joint attack against the Soviet Union from the west and the east, or against the British in Asia³³⁵. Instead, the Japanese forces chose to enter a conflict with the USA in December 1941 by attacking the military base of Pearl Harbour in Hawaii and, from

³³¹ [DDI, 9th, VIII, 169]

³³² Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini* (London 1981), pp. 269ff. See his relevant comments in *Ciano's Diaries*, 30.6.1941

³³³ *Ciano's Diaries*, 8.2.1943

³³⁴ Craveld, L. van, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941. The Balkan Clue* (London 1973), pp. 102ff. See also Hitler's relevant confession in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 2208 (28 February 1945)

³³⁵ On Hitler's strategic thoughts on this subject see DGFP, D, 11, 149. The arguments of the Japanese government are recorded in DDI, 9th, VIII, 152; IX, 359; and its refusal to join the war in DDI, 9th, VIII, 382. Cf. Goebbels' distrust of the Japanese declarations in Lochner, 22.4.1943

that point, concentrate on *their* war³³⁶. Although neither Germany nor Italy were bound by the provisions of the Axis pact to support Japan militarily in an *offensive* campaign, the German and Italian leaderships immediately declared war on the USA. Ironically, this was probably the best example of co-ordination among the three Axis partners³³⁷. It is difficult, though, to detect any trace of rationality behind this decision, especially given the critical stage of the German war in the east at the end of 1941³³⁸. There are indications that the Nazi leadership regarded the campaign against the Soviet Union as victorious from as early as October, and this belief was not questioned until well into 1942³³⁹. If the declaration of war against the USA reflected a certainty of triumph in the eastern front, it was a decision based on a very distorted view of the military situation there, and one that was not shared by the majority of the *Wehrmacht*'s leadership. The same wishful thinking lay behind the conviction of the Nazi leadership that the Japanese forces were strong enough to overpower the Americans in the Pacific³⁴⁰.

As for Italy, the realisation of defeat did not prompt necessary changes in the attitude of the regime. Hopes were nurtured that a victory of the Axis forces in north Africa and the Balkans would offer Italy extensive territorial gains in the region³⁴¹. At the same time, the fascist regime decided to assist Operation "Barbarossa" by sending troops to the eastern front. Undoubtedly, the secretive way in which the whole operation was prepared by the Nazi leadership caused considerable irritation

³³⁶ Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 310-41

³³⁷ On the background of the joint declaration of war against the USA by Germany and Italy, see DGFP, D, 8, 546/ 548/ 563/ 577/ 578

³³⁸ Noakes, Pridham, *Nazism*, III, pp. 830-4. First indications of problems were evident to the German leadership by the beginning of 1942 [DGFP, D, 13, 522; Lochner, 13.2.1942]. Cf., however, Hitler's unwavering optimism even in 1943 [ibid., 23.9.1943]

³³⁹ See, for example, how the Nazi leadership changed its strategy towards the implementation of the 'Final Solution'. Until August-September 1941, plans were postponed by Hitler on the basis of military and economic impact of such an enterprise for the operation "Barbarossa". Plans could be executed as soon as the military situation had clarified [Trevor-Roper, *Final Entries*, 23/24.9.1941]. By 11-1941 the Nazi political and military leadership thought of victory as imminent and triumphant (Hillgruber, A. (ed.), *Staatsmänner bei Hitler: Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes 1939-1941* (Frankfurt 1967), p. 626, quoted in Browning, pp. 119-20

³⁴⁰ Noakes, Pridham, *Nazism*, III, p. 831

³⁴¹ See, for example, DGFP, D, 12, 510, where Germany concedes full control of Greece to the Italian government. Also, there is evidence that the Italian government regarded the Balkans as an exclusively Italian zone (D, 12, 379)

on the Italian side. In his instructions to the Wehrmacht in early March 1941 Hitler explicitly stated that neither the Italians nor the Japanese should be kept in the dark about Operation Barbarossa³⁴². Yet, the Italian participation in the operation reflected Mussolini's desperate attempt to repair the damaged prestige of Italian Fascism³⁴³. He was ecstatic when in late September 1941 he was informed of the Italian contribution to the Axis victories against the Red Army³⁴⁴. He desperately desired an impressive showing of the Italian armed forces in order to re-establish Italy as Germany's major partner in the Axis alliance. So, when in October the Rumanian troops were making significant progress in the southern front of Ukraine, he confessed his sadness to Ciano for "having taken second place to the Rumanians"³⁴⁵. The situation continued to deteriorate, however, and by the end of 1942 the Axis forces were fighting a losing war against the advancing Allied forces in N. Africa³⁴⁶. This meant that soon Italy would be exposed to an attack from the south³⁴⁷. Furthermore, as Germany's military position grew weaker on the continent, the northern parts of Italy suffered from increasing air attacks which disrupted industrial production and demoralised the population³⁴⁸. Collapse became imminent when in June 1943 the Allied forces invaded Sicily and steadily stepped up the pressure on Rome³⁴⁹. In a few weeks' time, the fascist Grand Council decided to curtail the powers of Mussolini and then, in co-operation with the King, to dismiss him from office. Under the new Badoglio regime, Italy negotiated an armistice and put a hasty

³⁴² Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 1672-3 (Directive 24, 45 March 1941)

³⁴³ Duce's anger is shown in his remarks in Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 1736 and *Ciano's Diaries*, 1.7.1941. On Italy's participation in the operation see Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, pp. 276-7; Clark, M., *Modern Italy, 1860-1995* (London 1996), pp. 285-9; DGFP, D, 12, p. 924; DDI, 9th, VIII, 155/194. See also Ciano's and Mussolini's desperate attempt to persuade Hitler to include more Italian forces in "Barbarossa", in DGFP, D, 13/424/522

³⁴⁴ *Ciano's Diaries*, 30.9.1941

³⁴⁵ *Ciano's Diaries*, 17.10.1941

³⁴⁶ Noakes, Pridham, *Nazism*, III, pp. 846-8; DDI, 9th, IX, 421; X, 316 and 421. See also Goebbels' comments in Lochner, 28.4. 1943, and 7-9 and 12-14.5.1943

³⁴⁷ DDI, 9th, X, 18/ 99/ 155/ 497/ 498. Cf. Lochner, 13.5.1943

³⁴⁸ This tangible failure of the Italian regime was what transformed the passive disillusionment with, and rejection of, the fascist experiment into active opposition. See Thompson, D., pp. 146-8; Aquarone, *Stato Totalitario*, pp. 310-2, and "Public Opinion in Italy before the Outbreak of World War II", in Sarti, R. (ed.), *The Ax Within. Italian Fascism in Action* (New York 1974), pp. 209-20

³⁴⁹ Aga-Rossi, E., "La politica degli Alleati verso l' Italia nel 1943", *Studi Storici*, 3 (1972), pp. 843-95

end to her participation in the Axis war³⁵⁰. Mussolini was rescued from his prison by German commandos and was re-established as the leader of a puppet-state in the north of the peninsula, but this did not save Fascism from a humiliating collapse. The Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*), as the state was called, remained under the political control of Germany and reflected long-term Nazi plans for a future Italian state under German tutelage³⁵¹.

The last stage of the fascist war in 1942-5 did not record any attempt to achieve an effective co-ordination between the European and the Pacific campaigns. In all respects, the Axis war in Europe had ceased to be a war of expansion since the end of 1941, when the German offensive in the eastern front failed to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union. A glimmer of hope was offered to the Germans with the success of the second major summer offensive of 1942, but the Russian counter-offensives reduced the German campaign to a desperate exercise in hopeless defence and self-sacrifice, as the Nazi leadership continued to dismiss calls from the *Wehrmacht* generals for a tactical retreat. Hitler preferred to condemn his forces to defeat and decimation in Stalingrad than to accept capitulation or withdrawal³⁵². Attempts to seize the strategic initiative in the east continued in 1943 with the launching of Operation Citadel, but this was a limited offensive action which bore little relevance to the initial large-scale objectives of Barbarossa and it nevertheless failed to reverse the inauspicious situation in the east³⁵³. From mid-1943 onwards the German forces were forced into a steady retreat with minimum co-ordination and

³⁵⁰ On the dismissal of Mussolini see De Felice, R., *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. 1b: *Crisi e agonia del regime* (Turin 1990), pp. 1089-1410; DDI, 9th, X, 509 and 528; and, for the German view on the events, Lochner, 26-8.7.1943. On Italy's armistice, see DDI, 9th, X, 754/ 769/ 773; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 2024

³⁵¹ De Felice, R., "La questione dell' Alto Adige nei rapporti italo-tedeschi dall' Anschluss alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale (1938-1945)", *Studi Storici*, 3 (1972), pp. 765ff. See also Toscano, M., *Alto Adige - South Tyrol: Italy's Frontier with the German World* (Baltimore 1975); Collotti, E., *L' amministrazione tedesca dell' Italia occupata 1943-1945* (Milan 1963); Schröder, J., "La caduta di Mussolini e la contromisure tedesche nell' Italia centrale fino alla formazione della Repubblica Sociale Italiana", in De Felice (ed.), *Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati*, pp. 137-170. For the German plans for the occupation of northern Italy, see Domarus, *Hitler*, II, pp. 2033ff (Clarification to the Press regarding "Badoglio's Treason", 8 September 1943)

³⁵² For the Battle of Stalingrad see Ziemke, E. F., *Moscow to Stalingrad. Decision in the East* (Washington 1987), pp. 430ff; Weinberg, *World at Arms*, pp. 447-64. See also Hitler's refusal to order retreat or capitulation in Stalingrad in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 844-5

³⁵³ For Operation "Citadel" see Klink, E., *Das Gesetz des Handels. Die Operation 'Zitadelle', 1943* (Stuttgart 1966); and various documents in Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, Ch. 33

extremely heavy casualties. At the same time, after the successful landing of British and American forces in Normandy in June 1944, German forces were trapped in a two-front war in Europe, under huge pressure from numerically larger and psychologically confident armies³⁵⁴. Despite orders for an all-out defence and the “scorched earth” directive³⁵⁵, the Nazi military forces were in constant retreat. On the other hand, Japan was fighting her own war against the USA under increasingly inauspicious conditions.

The change of the Axis war from an offensive to a desperate defensive campaign for survival destroyed the last prospects of co-ordination. As the number and power of Axis’ enemies increased and their fighting capacity was enhanced, lack of cohesion in the fascist bloc transformed what was meant to be a joint campaign into three separate wars with inadequate co-ordination and planning. Such a strategy was self-defeating. The geographical location of Germany’s expansionist plans gave the Nazi regime the role of Axis co-ordinator *par excellence*. This role was also justified by the significantly stronger fighting power of the German armed forces compared to Italy and, to a degree, Japan³⁵⁶. At no point, however, did the Nazi leadership attempt to co-ordinate the disparate interests of those involved in the Axis alliance. Even the efforts to plan along with Italy the European war in 1940/1 reflected an assessment that this campaign was mainly a German war. Consequently, Italy waged her own war in the Mediterranean and Japan pursued her own plans in the Pacific. Faced with the better co-ordinated strategy and military effort of their enemies, the Axis states’ individualism during the war reduced the whole fascist war to a state of political and military “uncontemporaneity”. As a result, the political-military initiative gradually eluded the fascist regimes and thus the chances of a fascist victory were seriously compromised.

³⁵⁴ Noakes, Pridham (eds.), *Nazism*, III, pp. 865-74

³⁵⁵ Jacobsen, H.-A. (ed.), 1939-1945, p. 474; Noakes, J., Pridham, G. (eds.), *Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945* (London 1974), pp. 676-7. On Hitler’s insistence to fight all wars till the very end, see DDI, 9th, X, 31 and 733; Domarus, *Hitler*, II, p. 2022 (Proclamation for Operation “Citadel”, 4 July 1943)

³⁵⁶ Knox, “Expansionist Zeal”, pp. 115-20. This was an uneasy situation, which, however, the Italians came to admit in the last stages of their war [DDI, 9th, X, 31]

IV: Conclusions

From the viewpoint of the two fascist leaders, the Second World War was *eventually* fought with the determination to promote their long-term expansionist visions and to unify reality with utopia. The choice of war was consistent with fascism's ideological penchant for constant struggle, their sense of historic mission to advance a revolutionary international "new order", and their radicalised objectives and methods in the second half of the 1930s. Mussolini's *guerra parallela* in north Africa and the Balkans in autumn 1940 originated from a commitment to a large-scale, long conflict which would dramatically reconfigure the balance of power in the Mediterranean region and would attain Italy's centuries-long dream of a *mare nostrum*. Hitler's decision to launch Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 was conceived as a total campaign of annihilation in an ultimate attempt to reclaim Germany's "historic *Lebensraum*" and to eradicate the Bolshevik-Jewish element from Europe. Both these decisions transformed the conflict from a conventional strategic struggle for limited political objectives into a war of far-reaching ideological ambitions and transcendental historic significance for the two regimes and the future of fascism. After 1940-41 there was no turning-back option; the survival of fascism and any other outcome short of total victory had become mutually exclusive.

Having said that, neither the timing nor the form of the war were shaped according to the two leaders' ideological or strategic *desiderata*. Although the decision to invade Poland reflected Hitler's conscious choice of aggression and his determination to avoid another Munich-style agreement, opposition from the western powers transformed a local into a general conflict. A campaign against the west had been envisaged by Hitler in 1939 in order to avoid the prospect of a two-front war, but the British-French ultimatum forced it upon him earlier than he had anticipated and before reaching optimal targets for rearmament. In this sense, his war plans until the summer of 1940 concentrated on the strategic target of neutralising western opposition in contradiction to his long-term objectives and strategic preconceptions. The failure of the campaign against Britain constituted the first major setback in Nazi

foreign policy and confronted the Nazi leadership with a clear discrepancy between reality and vision, or - put in more familiar terms - between structures and intentions. However, at exactly this point Hitler turned his back on strategic prerequisites and structural contradictions in order to concentrate on his ideological priority of expanding in the east. His decision to attack the Soviet Union marked a qualitative step from strategic to ideological war, but was also reached under the pressure of failure in the west and his personal impression that time was running out.

In a similar vein, the timing of Mussolini's decision to enter the conflict in June 1940 was defined to the greatest extent by the ferocious pace of Nazi expansion and the ideological aversion of the fascist regime to neutrality. Although participation in the Axis war was expected to ensure concrete territorial gains in the Mediterranean, Mussolini was aware of the limited military capacity of the Italian armed forces at that point and of his equally limited initiative in a war dominated by German interests and successes. He *had* to join the conflict but there is no indication that he perceived this particular war as the real *guerra fascista*. Until early in the autumn of 1940 he had accepted a secondary role in the context of what he expected to be a short campaign leading to a better peace. When, however, the Germans failed to launch Operation Sea Lion and lost the initiative in the campaign against Britain, Mussolini hastened to exploit this window of opportunity by radicalising Italy's war aims and assuming the leadership of the Axis war against Britain. This was a major qualitative step which the Italian leader was compelled to take much earlier than he had desired, in military and economic circumstances that were far from optimal. Yet, at no point did material and structural factors play a decisive role in Mussolini's decision-making during the crucial months of September 1940 and March 1941. Faced with what he perceived as a historic opportunity, the *Duce* responded with a determination to fight and achieve large-scale war goals in defiance of any *rational* assessment of available means and strategic prerequisites.

The fascist war practically ceased to be a war of expansion during 1941-2. First, the defeat of the Italian armed forces in all fronts (Egypt, Greece, Ethiopia) put a swift end to Mussolini's aspirations for a real *guerra fascista*. Second, the failure of the German *Blitzkrieg* against the Soviet Union by the end of 1941 and the ineffectiveness of the *Wehrmacht* offensives in 1942 thwarted Hitler's ideological

goal of annihilating the Soviet army and leadership. From that point onwards the foreign policies of the two fascist regimes were reduced to war-making which gradually assumed a desperate defensive character and led to the fall of Mussolini in 1943 and the eventual collapse of the Nazi regime in 1945. In the end, war intensified pre-existing qualities in the two regimes which severely hampered their prospects of success in the military effort. The problem that the fascist leaderships faced in finding a working balance between their objectives and the means for their implementation was related to failings in the whole context of foreign policy-making. The domestic victory of fascism undermined the capacity of the two systems for rational control and pluralism in the decision-making process, necessary for the success of the enterprise. The central role of Mussolini and Hitler in the two systems' foreign policy decision-making process thwarted any prospects for administrative rationalisation and for strategic reassessments which could openly question the soundness of the leaders' decisions, until the very end. It fixed their personal aspirations as the unalterable goals of their regimes, thus hindering a more flexible approach to what the two countries could seek from the war³⁵⁷. War fostered the leader-oriented, authoritarian tendencies of the two systems and limited even further the capacity of military/diplomatic groups or party officials to influence the formulation of major foreign policy goals and strategies. Alternative or opposing views were not, of course, eliminated, but their place in the two systems remained marginal and incompatible with the leaders' charismatic authority. Furthermore, lack of administrative rationality in the decision-making process of the two regimes affected negatively the potential for an effective co-ordination of resources. Finally, the antagonism between the two leaders for prestige and initiative destroyed the prospects of an effective international co-operation among the Axis partners in the conduct of what was supposed to be a joint military campaign. These failings resulted in a foreign policy which either ignored the problem of ends-means rationality, or attempted to remedy it by imposing increasingly less rational models

³⁵⁷ On the identification of the "personal" with the "national" in fascism see Geyer, "Restorative Elites", p. 154; Roseman, p. 216; Gentile, G., "The Philosophical Basis of Fascism", *Foreign Affairs*, 6 (1928), p. 291

of foreign policy-making³⁵⁸. In 1940-41 the two fascist leaders embarked upon the realisation of its ultimate expansionist visions, transforming the war into a fundamental campaign for the triumph or collapse of fascism as a whole. By the time domestic and international factors had annulled the hopes of a fascist victory, the two regimes had long before crossed the Rubicon of normality to be able to contemplate any form of compromise. Any alternative policy or course of action was meaningful only *after* the removal of the leader from power, constitutionally if that was possible (the Grand Council motion of 24/25 July 1943 in Italy) or in a conspiratorial manner (for example, the 20 July plot in Germany; and Victor Emmanuel III's schemes in March 1940). In the same way that the war had become the personal project of Mussolini's and Hitler's ideological obsessions, fascism itself completed its total identification with the decisions and the fate of its two charismatic leaders.

³⁵⁸ For a short discussion of the problem of ends-means rationality in fascist foreign policy see Herf, J., *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (London 1984), pp. 1-17

CONCLUSIONS

I. The study of fascist expansionism: ideology and other factors

In concluding his *Fascism: A History* (1996), R. Eatwell notes that “fascism emerged as a significant force ... as a result of a complex inter-relationship between national traditions, the actions of key leaders ... and socio-economic developments, especially crisis”¹. It is vital to stress that the study of fascism and of its political choices - not least of all, territorial expansion - cannot be properly comprehended from a single viewpoint. There has been a plethora of studies in recent years which have highlighted diverse reasons why fascism became socially and politically dominant in Italy and Germany during the 1920s and 1930s. A number of studies have also accounted for the complexity of fascist expansionism, as ideology *and* practice. The debate about the programmatic or not character of fascist foreign policies has produced a vast diversification of arguments, each of which stresses the significance of some factors whilst questioning the validity of others. At the same time, research on continuities between pre-fascist and fascist foreign policy has provided invaluable insight into the place of fascism in the post-unification ideological and political traditions of the two countries. Fifty years after the collapse of the fascist regimes in Italy and Germany, fascist expansionism is still studied from a variety of points of view: as foreign policy, as ideological tradition, as domestic policy projected outwards, as pure opportunism, as atavism.

The widening of the scope of research, encompassing ideology, structural factors and international relations, has contributed to the elaboration of our

¹ Eatwell, R., *Fascism: A History* (London 1996), p. 279

understanding of fascism, and of its expansionist policies in particular. It has helped to transgress the initial demonisation of Hitler, to cast aside our moral revulsion against Nazi crimes and to induce a more dispassionate assessment of Nazism's nature and roots. It has also effectively questioned the conventional portrayal of Mussolini as simply a buffoon, an inept imitation of Hitler with no defined ideological beliefs or political convictions. Furthermore, the debate about fascism's relations with the national past has introduced a fruitful interest in studying fascism not simply as *sui generis* case, but in relation to a plethora of long- and short-term dimensions: intellectual traditions, institutional developments, the crisis of the *anciens régimes*. In this new, wider framework of study, the importance of ideology for the analysis of fascist expansionist policies is still passionately debated and constantly reassessed, but is also summarily dismissed or played down by a considerable number of researchers of Fascism and Nazism. Extreme structuralists, like H. Mommsen, are still advocating an approach which highlights the "blind" character of Nazi expansionism as a symptom of uncontrolled radicalism and as a desperate diversion from domestic pressures. Ideological pronouncements, the argument goes, were a form of lip service to a mirage of constant revolution, an exercise in deception and propaganda in order to uphold the regime's legitimacy and to appease the radical critique of the old fighters. More recently, Roberto Vivarelli epitomised this reaction by denying Fascism any intellectual substance, arguing instead that we should focus only on its political practices. For him, "Fascist ideology" was an exercise in political "deception" and not a doctrine with any claim to coherence and validity. Words reflected neither convictions nor intentions; they were mere propaganda in the service of legitimising shifting policies and of giving the impression of consistency to otherwise unprincipled policy-making².

Why study ideology, then, in order to analyse fascist expansionism? The first reason for this is to gain a general insight into the most extreme fascist policies, of which expansionism (with all its consequences) was a striking example. The extension of the intentionalist-structuralist debate to the issue of the Holocaust, the

² Vivarelli, R., "Interpretations of the Origins of Fascism", *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), pp. 29f

bitterness of the *Historikerstreit*³, and the immense interest in the Goldhagen controversy, to mention only recent historiographical developments, have shown that the discussion on the significance of ideology in fascism is not over. If large-scale expansionism and war were responses to domestic deadlock or the outcome of cumulative radicalisation, then why should we assume that expansion was the obvious and logical choice for diversion from domestic problems? Why was radicalisation expressed in these terms? Even if we dismiss the ideological pronouncements of Mussolini and Hitler as propaganda, even if we interpret expansion as a reaction to domestic crisis, there is always a process which formulates intentions and prioritises options. This process is not a-historical: it takes place within a framework of long-term intellectual and political developments, and it reflects what a given individual or group perceives as legitimate and/or desirable in a certain historical context. As S. C. Azzi has noted, traffic accidents do not happen “solely because of the existence of automobiles”⁴. Expansionism was neither the only nor the most obvious or predetermined policy option at the disposal of the two fascist leaderships.

This justifies the focus of research on fascist *Weltanschauung* as a means to interpreting fascist practice. However, the capacity of ideological predispositions to determine foreign policy should not be exaggerated. The endeavours of the fascist regimes to translate ideas into action belonged to the realm of *intentions*. The reality was radically different. Neither of the two leaderships possessed any concrete idea as to how they could achieve their long-term objectives, what it entailed to promote them, and what the measure of success was *in the short term*. In fact, their obsession with long-term visions made them opportunistic *par excellence*. Fascist “new territorial order” was such a long-term goal, opening up vast new opportunities and fuelling their ambitions. It was associated with certain prerequisites: domestic unity, authoritarian state, rearmament, a new “fascist” mentality for the masses, a more

³ Kershaw, I., *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London 1989, 2nd ed.), pp. 168-91; Kühnl, R. (ed.), *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergeht* (Cologne 1987); Maier, C., *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Munich 1988); Knowlton, J., Cates, T. (eds.), *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (New Jersey 1993)

⁴ Azzi, S. C., “The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy”, *The Historical Journal*, 1 (1993), p. 203

radical handling of foreign affairs. Yet, what was conspicuously lacking was a concrete idea about how to manage the process of change. This is true not only of Italian Fascism, where the lack of programmatic pronouncements by Mussolini has been widely discussed, but also of Nazism, where Hitler's alleged clarity of intention (as expressed in *Mein Kampf* and in the *Second Book*) should not be exaggerated. Both regimes provided the necessary short-term impetus by advocating an uncompromising activism, they could rally support by invoking the emotional power of their utopias, but the rest was left to experiment, risk and the alleged intuition of their leaders.

In this sense, the study of ideology is a necessary, but not a sufficient factor in explaining the specific choice and sequence of expansionist initiatives undertaken by the Italian and German fascist regimes. Domestic structural conditions and long-term features of the two systems affected decision-making and often limited the freedom of the two leaderships to conduct foreign affairs according to their wishes and preferred style. R. De Felice attributed the relative lack of radical expansionist moves by the Fascist regime during the "decade of good behaviour" to the priority given to domestic consolidation and re-organisation⁵. A. Cassels also underlined the restraining influence of traditional bureaucrats, especially of the Foreign Office, on the *Duce's* diplomacy⁶. In the late 1930s, the low level of preparation and the limited capacity of the system for economic and military mobilisation delayed Italy's entry into the war until June 1940, in spite of Mussolini's ascertained desire to join Nazi Germany in the major territorial re-organisation of the "new order". In Germany, the economic and military limitations of the Versailles Treaty convinced Hitler of the vulnerability of the country's defensive position and dictated a relatively more cautious and limited foreign policy until 1936. At the same time, the strength of the traditional elite groups and institutions - a feature that was much less pronounced in the Italian state - created a more pluralistic framework of foreign policy-making, in which the intentions of the Nazi leadership had to be negotiated with the expert advice and procedures of powerful state institutions, such as the armed forces and the *Wilhelmstrasse*. A

⁵ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. I: *Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin 1974), pp. 320ff

⁶ Cassels, A., *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, New Jersey 1970)

further potential problem pertained to the NSDAP's more elaborate structure and more pronounced ambitions to replace the state and play a central role in the reshaping of the domestic system in a totalitarian direction. Only gradually did the establishment of an authoritarian, leader-oriented system result in the subordination of elite groups and party ambitions to the rule of the two leaders, depriving the former of their right to co-decision-making and relegating the latter to a functional status of interpreting and executing the leaders' charismatic will.

Another important factor for understanding the interaction between ideological intentions and structures was the framework of international relations. According to De Felice, the absence of radical initiatives in Italian foreign policy after the Corfu incident had to be linked with a general lack of external opportunities for expansion in a European system still geared to defending the stability of the postwar status quo at all costs. In the second half of the 1930s the Nazi expansionist momentum forced the pace and radicalised the style of Fascist expansionist policies, both through the opportunities offered by the Axis alliance and as a reaction to German unilateral actions. While the illusion of opportunity speeded up plans for the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, the impact of Nazi successes in early 1940 forced the *Duce* to reconsider Italy's "non-belligerence" and to order participation in a war he could only partly control and even less shape. In Germany, the July 1934 coup in Vienna served as an eloquent reminder to Hitler that the attainment of anti-system goals presupposed a more favourable international constellation and a more developed revisionist culture amongst the other European powers which was wanting at that point. Munich was another lesson, this time regarding the aversion of the western powers to aggressive solutions and use of force for territorial changes. Much that A. J. P. Taylor exaggerated the importance of international developments in the ensuing period until September 1939 for the outbreak of war, he was right in one respect - the invasion of Poland took place in circumstances which had been neither anticipated nor desired by the Nazi leadership. In this sense, Nazi foreign policy until the launching of Operation Barbarossa reflected the necessity to cope with the inauspicious strategic consequences of September 1939 and the abject failure of Italy's "parallel" war. Failure to rectify the situation in late 1940-early 1941 (namely, by forcing Britain to accept defeat) compromised the planning and execution of the invasion of Soviet Union in June 1941.

The significance of these factors in the shaping of foreign policy underscores the need to re-think our definition of *programme*. Much of the confusion and acidity surrounding interpretations of fascist foreign policies has emanated from a flawed distinction between programme as “general ideas” and programme as a rigid “stage-by-stage” guide for action. This has led to an equally inflexible contrast between opportunism and “blind” expansion, on the one hand, and programmatic consistency, on the other⁷. Just like ideology, “programmes” allude to long-term goals and priorities but not to the day-to-day conduct of foreign affairs. No political elite has ever come to power with a definite agenda for action *and* has managed to abide by it without diversions, reassessments and setbacks. In this respect, the only meaningful distinction should be between *primary*, that is persistent, and *secondary*, flexible and alterable goals of foreign policy-making, as well as between choice of objectives and decision about timing, strategies and means. The crucial test for the “programmatic” character of a regime’s foreign policy is whether these primary objectives were consistently reflected in pronouncements and underpinned the long-term rationale of foreign policy-making; whether they were pursued with determination; and whether secondary goals were designed to aid - or, at least, not to contradict - the attainment of those primary objectives. Rather than dismissing opportunism and tactical flexibility as lack of ideological commitment, we should perhaps analyse the logic of such pliability and how it related to long-term priorities or declared goals. However, this is precisely what is lacking even in the most sophisticated social imperialist approaches. They correctly emphasise how the timing of certain initiatives reflected attempts to boost the popularity of the fascist regimes and how success was exploited by the regimes’ propaganda industry to strengthen their legitimacy. They do, however, concentrate heavily on the short-term reasoning of foreign policy-making and thus lose sight of the wider priorities and aspirations which underpinned the long-term conduct of foreign affairs by the two leaderships.

This long-term dimension in the foreign policy of the two fascist regimes was informed by a complex notion of *living space*. The visions of a Mediterranean *mare nostrum* in Fascism and of a vast eastern empire in Nazism encompassed

⁷ See the discussion in Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 122-5; Azzi, “Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy”, pp. 187-90

concrete geographical areas of expansion and were prescribed by general ideological beliefs shared by the two regimes. The foci of expansion were defined through a combination of historic, geopolitical and ideological elements which linked each country's glorious past with the right to reclaim its historic position of greatness in the future. However, the acquisition of living space was also presented as a "natural" necessity, justified by the belief in history as the domain of the "fittest", by the alleged "elite" character of the two nations, and by the symbolic significance of territory for great-power status. In this sense, the notions of *spazio vitale* and *Lebensraum* became figurative and composite expressions both of a general propensity for expansion -as an open-ended, permanent state of affairs- and of concrete aspirations, reinforced by historical, geopolitical and ideological factors specific to each country and regime.

Particular goals were prioritised (Adriatic, north Africa, Suez and southern Balkans for Italy; *Mitteleuropa* and Soviet Union for Germany), but timing and planning were greatly determined by external opportunities and limitations. Because of the vague character of their long-term expansionist visions, each regime could constantly reassess its short-term strategy and choose from a plethora of options and methods of policy-making. Opportunity arose from the lack of clear-cut strategies, and this was both a curse and a blessing for the two fascist regimes. It was a curse because it could not generate clear standards, against which the achievements of the regimes could be assessed. This deprived the two regimes of a clear idea about the suitability of their means, the soundness of their strategies and the feasibility of their goals. It was, however, a blessing because it enhanced the tactical flexibility of the two leaders. In practice, many of the political ventures of the two regimes failed to produce desirable developments or conditions conducive to the advancement of the fascist visions. However, the extent of these failures was not as apparent to the leaderships then as it seemed with the benefit of hindsight. The far-reaching character of fascist visions rendered only one failure intelligible - *total* defeat. Anything short of that presented new opportunities and hopes.

It is, indeed, ironic that the debate about the programmatic or not substance of fascist foreign policies consumed most of its intellectual energy in a

futile polarisation without realising the need for synthesis⁸. The dilemma of “intention versus structure” cannot be resolved by deciding *a priori* which is more significant, and then by applying the conclusion to the study of the two regimes’ foreign policies. This study examined fascist expansionism in the three levels it was expressed and pursued - as ideology, as foreign policy and as a joint *fascist* undertaking which facilitated each regime’s plans and (especially with regard to Fascist Italy) acted as a catalyst to a latent radicalism in the scope and style of expansionist policies. Understanding to what extent ideology underpinned, and was translated into action presupposes a critical awareness of the constant interaction between the above factors.

II. “National” traditions and “fascist” innovations: the *continuity* debate

The second major question pertinent to the nature of fascist expansionism is whether it was informed by idiosyncratic “fascist” values and aspirations or was simply an expression of pre-existing national traditions and practices. If fascist ideology was indeed a “scavenger”, amalgamating different nationalist and revolutionary traits into a new ideological edifice and re-launching past utopias as realisable goals of foreign policy⁹, then how truly unique was the fascist commitment to territorial expansion in style and scope? With regard to style, fascism clearly followed a more active and uncompromising approach to the handling of foreign affairs. N. O’Sullivan has spoken of the “activist style of fascist politics” as a feature which distinguishes fascism from previous liberal and conservative regimes in Italy and Germany¹⁰. Emphasis on action, violence and war was dictated by pivotal beliefs at the heart of the fascist ideological minimum - social Darwinism, revolutionary dynamism, the ideal of a “citizen-soldier”, the glorification of military values in

⁸ Griffin, R., “Three Faces of Fascism”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 30 (1996), pp. 65-70

⁹ Mosse, G. L., “Towards a General Theory of Fascism”, in Mosse (ed.), *International Fascism. New Thoughts and New Approaches* (London & Beverly Hills 1979), pp. 1-41

¹⁰ O’Sullivan, N., *Fascism* (London & Melbourne 1983), Ch. 2-4

national history, as epitomised in the Roman Empire and the Teutons. At the same time, the leader-oriented, authoritarian style of rule signified an efflux of authority from traditional state institutions and bureaucracies to the fascist leaderships, whose approach to foreign policy-making was characterised by a distinct lack of attention to procedures and protocol. Charisma and routine proved extremely difficult to reconcile, thus resulting in a much more unpredictable and dynamic attitude to foreign policy, unbound by the usual prerequisites and subtleties of Realpolitik. Aggression became a legitimate weapon of fascist policy for attaining “just” goals, regardless of its destructive implications for others.

It is, however, with regard to the nature and scope of fascist expansionism that the debate on continuity has raised a series of objections to the putative “fascist” character of the two regimes’ expansionist policies. R. De Felice spoke of the “years of consensus” with reference to the period between 1929 and the Ethiopian campaign. His belief in the genuine, deep character of such a consensus might have been exaggerated, failing to take into account the superficiality of “fascistisation” at a societal level¹¹. There was, however, undoubtedly wide popular support for the regime’s foreign policy until the mid-1930s, even for such “radical” initiatives such as the occupation of Corfu and the invasion of Ethiopia¹². In Germany, a similar sense of consensus surrounded the successful pursuit of revisionist and irredentist goals by the Nazi regime until 1938. As I. Kershaw has shown, the cult of the Führer reached its peak in the second half of the 1930s, when the territory of the Reich was extended dramatically and dextrously without necessitating a military engagement¹³. Even when disagreements between the Nazi leadership and conservative officials in the armed forces and the Wilhelmstrasse arose in 1938-39, these pertained mainly to the timing and the potentially disastrous international repercussions of the use of aggression.

The debate on continuities between fascist and pre-fascist foreign policies has hit raw nerves in both countries, often offending the moral desire to castigate fascism by presenting it as an aberration of national history, alien to its long-term legacies

¹¹ See the detailed analysis of the *Dopolavoro* in De Grazia, V., *The Culture of Consent. Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge 1981), esp. pp. 220ff

¹² De Felice, R., *Mussolini il duce*, vol. 1: *Gli anni del consenso*. See also, in this study, Chs. 3, 4

¹³ Kershaw, I., *The “Hitler-Myth”. Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford 1989), Ch. 5

and characteristics. However, much that fascism comprised a coherent, autonomous system of thought, it was also to a great extent the product of interwar crisis, derived from a different reading of the same historic data. Its place within the tradition of radical nationalism, as well as its ideological debts to previous currents, movements and mentors, have all been well established and documented. In this sense, continuity was the result of fascism's own process of production and systematisation, as well as an important factor in its popular appeal. As a "nationalism plus" phenomenon, fascism fused its own intrinsic ideological and political traits with conventional national beliefs, suppressed or frustrated aspirations, and more extreme, latent pre-existing tendencies.

It was, however, the nature and parameters of this fusion that determined the limits of continuity. Each fascist regime displayed a selectivity towards traditional goals and forms of border policy, prioritising some and playing down or even relinquishing others. Even before the radicalisation of fascist expansionist policies in the second half of the 1930s, the regimes often showed a desire to go beyond these widely shared objectives (for example, intervention in the Spanish Civil War) in pursuit of wider goals and to the dismay of traditional diplomatic and military elite figures. From the extensive reservoir of what was perceived as legitimate territorial aggrandisement (revisionism, colonialism, continental living space, irredentism) each regime made choices and established priorities which were informed by a long-term vision of acquiring living space in areas identified through historic, geopolitical and ideological factors. The shift from border to living space policy might have been consistent with previous radical nationalist calls for world-power status, but was popularised, radicalised and pursued by the fascist regimes with a dynamism and historic urgency which emanated from a specifically "fascist" commitment to unite utopia with reality. In this respect, the unconventional fascist approach to foreign affairs cancelled the *Realpolitik* distinction between feasible and unattainable goals, dictating instead an attitude that took utopia at face value and pursued it to its extremes. This tendency became more conspicuous in the context of war from 1940 onwards, when both regimes turned their back to rational assessments of domestic capabilities and international factors in pursuit of their more far-reaching expansionist goals. The legitimisation of violence/war and the elitist basis of fascist worldview opened up opportunities and offered solutions which previous liberal and

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conservative regimes were less inclined to subscribe to. If we remove these elements from our interpretation of fascist foreign policies, then fascist expansionism is deprived of an overall explanation for its specific choices and methods.

Therefore, while the long-term objectives of fascist expansionism were by no means the exclusive domain of fascist ideology, their systematisation, prioritisation and dynamic pursuit were underpinned by specific “fascist” values and prescriptions. This dualism between the national and the fascist underscores the need to abandon the rigidity of the “continuity versus discontinuity” debate, opting instead for an understanding of fascist expansionism as a special form of ideological commitment to living space expansion, whose individual goals and justifications were derived from nationalist utopias and mythmaking but synthesised according to “fascist” priorities and views. This formula does not exhaust the interpretation of idiosyncratic features in the policies of each regime. It does, however, provide a basis for the comprehension of the two regimes’ distinct propensity for large-scale expansion as a special feature derived from a generic fascist “minimum”.

III. Leaders, “fascist” values and “national” interest

The cult of leader remained the most important cohesive factor throughout the life span of fascism, both for the fascist movements and, after the acquisition of power, for the two regimes too. Each leader occupied a special position in the collective mythology of fascism as the historic guiding force at the time of oppositional struggle, as the person who led fascism to power, codified disparate beliefs and systematised the fascist doctrine. In the hostile environment of the first coalition governments in 1922 in Italy and in 1933 in Germany the symbolic importance of the each leader increased - he now bore the responsibility of safeguarding fascism against “normalisation” and of ensuring its final dominance in the domestic system. Mussolini and Hitler used the powers derived from their position as Heads of leader-oriented regimes to identify themselves with two loyalties - to fascism and to the nation as a whole. This difficult task depended upon, first, their ability to express collective fascist values accurately and effectively in the

name of their movements; and, second, upon their success in convincing public opinion that these fascist values and aspirations would represent national interests in the best possible way. With regard to foreign policy, this task presupposed that they could fuse the spirit of fascism into foreign policy-making, combining expansionist goals with the fascist demand for a radical social-economic and spiritual transformation. It also rested upon their ability to show in a tangible way that fascism could interpret, formulate and promote national interests better than previous political ideologies, thus enabling their nations to fulfil their destiny.

In this sense, the accumulation of power and responsibility by the two leaders in the handling of foreign affairs was not intended to render foreign policy a preserve of their personal visions. In theory, the two charismatic leaders acted in their capacity to express (and unite) fascist and national interests on behalf of their movements and nations respectively. Mussolini's vision of Mediterranean *spazio vitale* fused traditional great-power aspirations of the post-unification period, the myth of historic destiny for a "third Italy", the fascist belief in activism/war as a vehicle for social transformation, and the ideological crusade of fascism against the "decadent" forces of liberalism and socialism. Hitler's dream of a *Lebensraum* empire in central and eastern Europe equally combined Nazi and German nationalist aspirations - the overturning of the "unjust" Versailles settlement, the right of the "talented peoples" to a fairer share of space, Germany's historic/cultural mission as an elite amongst the nations, and the crusade against the Bolshevik-Jewish alleged international conspiracy.

In performing this fusion, however, each leader reached different levels of success and persuasion. Mussolini's decision to align Italy with Nazi Germany remained a phenomenally unpopular choice until the very end, both amongst most Fascist *gerarchi* and in public opinion. After the war, Bottai described the Axis and the war fought in 1940-43 as a "Mussolinian", as opposed to a "Fascist" project¹⁴. This was probably an exaggerated statement, since all Fascist leaders eventually endorsed the regime's policy, reaffirming the symbolic capacity of their *Capo* to represent Fascist interest and values. It serves, however, to indicate that Mussolini did not convince even his closest colleagues in the regime and party that *that*

particular policy of expansion would promote general Fascist goals, both inside Italy and in the whole of Europe. As domestic transformation was an integral (and, for many Fascists, central) part of the Fascist worldview, Mussolini failed to relate the specific objectives of expansion in the context of Axis to such domestic goals. As Bottai commented, war and aggression halted civilian and cultural development when they were supposed to accelerate and deepen it¹⁵. Such doubts damaged the “infallible” image of the *Duce* and enhanced the gap between *mussolinismo* and Fascism, bringing prominent Fascists face-to-face with an uneasy clash of loyalties. At the same time, public apathy after the Ethiopian campaign and general hostility to Nazi Germany raised doubts amongst the population as to Mussolini’s ability to represent the country’s national interests in the framework of such a policy. Again, loyalty to the *Duce* remained for a long time a strong element of public perseverance to disasters, but it gradually became insufficient to overcome the impression that Fascism would not save the country and that defeat was impending. After 1941, when shortages of food and destruction by Allied bombardments dislocated domestic life, the Italian population did not exempt Mussolini from their bitter attacks on Fascism: he, Ciano, the other Fascist leaders, the detested party, the whole Fascism had to go¹⁶.

Hitler faced a similar challenge to his charismatic authority with his major “ideological revision” of August 1939, when he struck a deal with Nazism’s arch-enemy in the east. A public opinion indoctrinated according to the tenet of Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy was startled, while many Nazi figures were shocked by the change of attitude that this decision involved. The *Führer* also remained unmoved by the exhortations of even his closest aides (Goering, Goebbels) to reconsider his decision to launch the campaign against Poland at that particular time. Success, however, proved the strongest integrative factor for the “Hitler cult” - an element that Mussolini did not enjoy after the Ethiopian campaign. Furthermore, with the prioritisation and launching of “Operation Barbarossa” in June 1941 Hitler re-united his personal strategy with the most crucial common Nazi values of anti-

¹⁴ Bottai, G., *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* (Milan 1977), pp. 79-91

¹⁵ Bottai, *Vent'anni*, pp. 64-7

¹⁶ Colarizi, S., *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Rome & Bari 1991), pp. 327ff, 399-404

Bolshevism and anti-Semitism. The attack on the Soviet Union might have been the ultimate stage in his personal obsession with Germany's "historic" *Lebensraum* in the east, but it also offered opportunities for promoting other radical values and visions cherished by individual Nazi figures in the regime and party. The occupation of vast lands in the east in 1941-3 gave the alibi for radical experiments in the new lands, created personal spheres of jurisdiction for many Nazis and provided a vast *tabula rasa* which could be reorganised along the lines of Nazi ideology's most extreme prescriptions. At the same time, the significantly more tangible threat of Bolshevism in Germany (due to her geographical proximity to the Soviet Union) provided a stronger factor for public loyalty (or lack of opposition) to the regime, even when defeat and collapse became a certainty. For the majority of the population, Hitler had led Germany into an unavoidable war with Communism and the Jews which would decide the fate of the whole German nation. Compromise with, or capitulation to, such an enemy was unintelligible, if not totally unacceptable. With "Barbarossa" Hitler had managed to combine his personal fate with that of Nazism and Germany as a whole, in a way that Mussolini failed to do after the Ethiopian campaign¹⁷.

Therefore, while territorial expansion and aggression were extensions and expression of central, shared "fascist" values, the interpretation of these values and the formulation of expansionist goals in the actual conduct of foreign policy received different degrees of support and loyalty in each regime and country. Foreign policy-making involved how such values and how national interests were translated into action. Despite the alleged infallibility of the two leaders, criticisms by other prominent fascists were voiced, questioning - although never totally rejecting - the cult of the leader. In the end, loyalty came down to the success or failure of each leader's interpretations and risks. When defeat came closer (and this happened much earlier in Italy than in Germany), when the leaders' personal strategy had abjectly failed, fascism did not matter anymore; the survival of the nation, which fascism had failed to serve, became the utmost priority for fascists and non-fascists alike. In Italy, such a separation was possible as other surviving institutions (the Crown and the

¹⁷ For the attitudes of German public opinion in 1941-45 see Kershaw, I., *The "Hitler-Myth". Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford 1989), pp. 149-225

Church, for example) could provide a stable constitutional and social transition to a post-Mussolinian era. In Germany, however, the failure of conservative opposition to assassinate Hitler in July 1944 left no such alternatives. Only Goebbels in 1944 suggested shelving the Nazi tenet of anti-Bolshevism in order to strike a compromise with Stalin and thus save Germany from a total military defeat, but even those last-ditch efforts proved fruitless. A chapter in German history had to crawl to its devastating end before crucial redefinitions of what national interest involved could be considered.

IV. Dealing with differences: the limits of a *generic* definition of fascist expansionism

The limitations of a generic definition of fascist expansionism should be very carefully recorded and accounted for. While an obsessive emphasis on the specificity of each regime's views and policies obfuscates clear similarities between them, no plausible definition of generic fascism can be couched in terms of uniformity. As a "nationalism plus" phenomenon, rooted in autochthonous radical nationalist traditions, fascism itself retained distinctly *national* features and operated within long-term national structures. Apart from similarities in their ideological commitment to large-scale expansion, each regime recast particular national aspirations which inhered in the general cognitive model of the indigenous society. Furthermore, the realisation of their prescriptions depended on factors which were essentially impervious to, and uncontrolled by, their intentions. Economic resources, military preparedness and potential, international status, effectiveness of state structures, public loyalty to the state, were all fundamental components of foreign policy-making but could only partly be influenced during the short life-span of the

two regimes. They remained essentially different in each country and affected the intensity and effectiveness of each regime's policies¹⁸.

Any conventional typology of generic fascism has treated Nazism, with its higher fighting and destructive power, vast expansionist ambitions and fanaticism, as the most extreme or accomplished variant of fascism¹⁹. Others have interpreted the unspectacular use of force and aggression by the Italian Fascist regime as evidence of its half-hearted commitment to the goal of large-scale expansion. Especially amongst Italian historians, attempts to overstate the ideological and political differences of the two regimes have for a long time commanded the majority view. The contrast between Nazi atrocities in the Second World War and the notably less aggressive behaviour of the Italian troops in the Balkans²⁰; the more circumscribed expansionist plans of the Fascist regime compared to the millenarian racial aphorisms of the Nazi "new order"; the failure of totalitarianism in Italy as opposed to a projected image of a ruthless Nazi dictatorship based on extreme use of terror²¹, have served both as empirical observations about the nature of the two regimes' policies and as indications of their ideological divergence²². De Felice projected the argument even further, in the slippery territory of the leader's personality and of the people's "national character", stating that Mussolini was not "cruel", at least in the way that Hitler was²³. D. Mack Smith developed the argument in a totally different direction, portraying Mussolini as a caricature in an "unserious comedy world" of his own, with little relevance to, or influence upon, the cataclysmic events of the interwar period²⁴.

Of course, the potential of Italian Fascism for cruelty and terror was plainly manifested in a series of occasions, from the ruthless policies of "pacification" in Libya in the late 1920s to the racial policies in the *Impero* and the concentration

¹⁸ Knox, M., "Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships", in Bessel, R. (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996), pp. 115-33

¹⁹ Payne, pp. 462-70; Griffin, R., *The Nature of Fascism* (London & New York 1994), pp. 245-8

²⁰ Steinberg, J., *All or Nothing. The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-42* (London 1990)

²¹ Germino, D. L., *The Italian Fascist Party in Power. A Study in Totalitarian Rule* (New York 1971), pp. 141-4

²² Perfetti, F., *Il dibattito sul fascismo* (Rome 1984), pp. 10-3

²³ De Felice, R., *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. 1: *La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin 1966), p. 470

²⁴ Mack Smith, D., *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London 1976), pp. 252ff

camp at Ferramonti in southern Italy²⁵, although still paling into insignificance compared to the extent of Nazi acts of horror in occupied Europe and Soviet Union. Similarly, even if the fixations of Mussolini and Hitler might have been of extraordinary importance in such leader-oriented systems, the crude “either-or” rigidity of the *Führer*’s obsessions was significantly less pronounced or resolute in the *Duce*’s worldview. The establishment of a “totalitarian” system in Italy was hampered by the fragmentation of public loyalty between state, Crown and Church. Mechanisms of political opposition were largely suppressed by the regime, but bodies like the Fascist Grand Council retained a quasi-pluralistic function which initiated the process for the dismissal of Mussolini from power in 24/25 July 1943. A similar potential for institutional opposition was not possible in Nazi Germany, where allegiance to the state traditionally overshadowed any other forms of loyalty and was further reinforced through the charismatic basis of the *Führer*’s rule. As for foreign policy in particular, Nazi expansionism was more fanatically pursued, to the point of risking and eventually causing a major military confrontation which would decide the fundamental issue of world supremacy. Its effects were significantly more far-reaching than the unsuccessful Italian Fascist bid for Mediterranean mastery in 1940-41, not only in geographical scope but also in effectiveness. All these statements, however, underscore the importance of studying fascist expansionism both as an ideological commitment and as a process of translating it into reality. Notwithstanding the responsibility of the two leaders for the way their regimes were shaped, operated and acted, long-term economic, military and social structures of their countries were beyond their ephemeral reach. Discarding Italian Fascism as a farce or dismissing the ideological substance of its expansionist aspirations simply because effective foreign policy-making was hampered by limited economic capacity, absence of a militarist culture and failure of Fascist efforts to instil genuine loyalty to the state in the population, is to confuse the “fascist” with the “national”, the ideological with the political, the intention with the result. The challenge for any generic definition of fascist expansionism is to take note of these long-term differences and features in answering why such different societies converged upon a

²⁵ On the last issue see Capogreco, C. S., “I campi di internamento fascista per gli ebrei (1940-1943)”, *Storia Contemporanea*, 22 (1991), pp. 663-82

similar radical notion of territorial aggrandisement, why they chose to go to extremes in order to pursue it, and why they became allies in a horrifying undertaking. Concentrating exclusively on “what actually *happened*”, as De Felice and Vivarelli urged²⁶, thwarts what Griffin has described as “a healthy dialectic between theory and empiricism”²⁷, which is indispensable for the understanding of fascism’s long-term national roots, epochal nature and ephemeral success. In this sense, fascist expansionism remained both generic and specific to each country, recasting radical national aspirations with a distinctive “fascist” urgency, informing the general orientation of foreign policy-making, but also shaped into action under the confluence of national and international factors which remained largely impervious to fascist intentions.

The value of the comparative approach to fascism (and to its expansionist tendencies in particular) lies in its capacity to raise intriguing questions about both the similarities and the differences between Italian Fascism and German Nazism²⁸. Interpreting the expansionist ideologies and policies of the two regimes involves an understanding of a set of common “fascist” values and prescriptions (the “ideological minimum”), which explain the prioritisation of territorial expansion by the two fascist leaders. However, it also entails an awareness of national traditions, features of the two systems in the *longue durée*. A generic notion of *fascist expansionist ideology*, shared by the two regimes examined in this study, is validated by referring to the common values of the fascist “ideological minimum”. Yet, it is also challenged by idiosyncratic autochthonous factors in each country. This study has shown that fascist expansionism has to be examined as *ideology*, *action* and *process* (translating ideology into action and reality). The end-result (the actual policies and their effects) was different for each regime in style, dynamism, implications and effectiveness. The influence of internal and international factors, of competing domestic institutions and figures, of each leader’s personal interpretations and intuitions, have been noted and compared. If such differences and contradictions are carefully accounted for, then the

²⁶ Vivarelli, “Interpretations of the Origins of Fascism”, pp. 29-43; De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo* (Bari 1975), pp. 11ff

²⁷ Griffin, R., “Three Faces of Fascism”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 30 (1996), pp. 69-70

²⁸ Bosworth, R. J. B., *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and perspectives in the interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London 1998), Ch. 9, esp. pp. 229-30

notion of a *generic* fascist expansionism can be a valuable tool for analysis, providing crucial insight into the ideological visions and political practices of fascism in a way that no singular account for each regime is able to do.

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